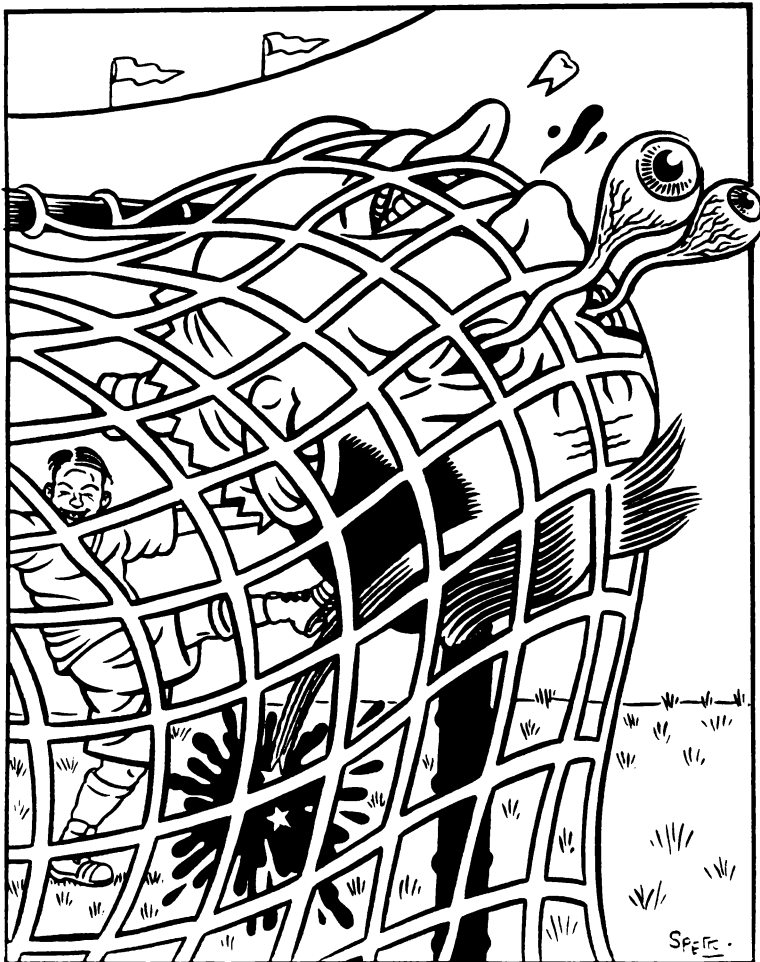


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SPORTS THRILLS





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In keeping with one of the finest, longest running, and greatest traditions of our little niche on the bottom rung of the publishing food chain, this issue is late. Very late. So what? I could tell you a long story, filled with tragic twists and turns, about the travails of a lazy zine publisher. It would be very boring, believe me. And you've heard before.

It's not like I've been sitting in front of the TV, drinking beer and eating nachos. I have no TV, hate nachos, and have even been on an anti-beer kick of late. But I have been writing like a madman. (OK, maybe a slightly annoyed man). Not for zines, for money. Readers rummaging through odd corners of the media may stumble across my byline in the damndest (often soon to be out of business) places, both print and electronic. *Stim. The Guide. Slant. The Bay Guardian Rage*. Even (once) *P.O.V.*. We're talking rent money, here. It's a very nice thing to have. I even finally was able to buy a nifty printer. Yippieeee!

Chances are you haven't missed much (except for maybe the article I did on Aaron Cometbus for *The Bay Guardian* which isn't getting reprinted and/or revived for odd reasons). The better stuff always has a second life--for example, a *much* shorter version of the "Great Big Game Disaster" piece in this issue originally saw the light of day in *Slant*. And much of the rest of what I've done for others is going out into cyberspace via this nifty new e-zine *Dispatches*. Just point your web browser to www.dispatches.org for plenty o' fun stuff, including a *MCBF* site featuring stuff of mine that's never made the zine. And don't forget to check out V/Search's *Zines! Vol. 2* for a different sort of contribution from yours truly.

Which brings us to the issue at hand. Sports. Yet another issue of *MCBF* devoted to this topic. If I had a nickel for every person who's asked me, "Haven't you already done a sports issue?", I could probably buy myself a very nice cup of coffee--maybe even a mocha. The answer is yes, I have, way back in the soon-to-be out-of-print *MCBF* #7. I just didn't do it very well. After that pallid effort went to press, I started finding all these other great things, many of which you will find in this issue. Hey--once I found out about the "Great Big Game Disaster", I knew I couldn't *not* write about it.

I didn't entitle this issue "I Hate Sports Vol. II" for a very good reason. After much reflection and mulling over it when I wanted to avoid doing things like housework, I realized I don't hate sports. I skim the sports pages daily. I can

partake in an occasional game of tennis with pleasure. I like to take in a baseball game perhaps once a year, although it generally works out to once every five years. I watch the occasional hockey game and snatches of football games--especially late in the season when snow is predicted. There are even some sports I am truly passionate about. If they still had roller derby at Kezar Pavilion, you couldn't keep me away.

No, it's not sports I hate. It's athletes, owners, and fans that I can't stand. I live in a city that's just been blackmailed for the second time in five years by some rich greedy owners into coughing up money for fancy new stadiums. It's enough to make you gag--multimillionaire jerks crying poor and idiotic yahoos (the most common breed of fan) wringing their hands over the threat that they might move the team. Don't these people have lives? Or brains? Ah, the horror. How can we possibly carry on? And the athletes--don't get me started. Just let me just say that if sports are such valuable learning experience, why are these classes restricted only to, say, those who can run 40 yards in 4.9 seconds in full football pads?

I derive a great of mild pleasure from sports, not the least of which is by gleefully witnessing the tragic thwarting of those who've dedicated their lives to the pursuit of utterly worthless goals. But I admit being hopelessly ambivalent. I can never decide whether college football players should be paid or merely shot.

But enough ranting. Although the next issue of *MCBF* will be something completely different, I plan on returning to sports again one of these days. There are still some great stories out there that I wasn't able to do because of time and space constraints. The CFL player who got killed helping his brother hold up the liquor store, Roman chariot faction riots, boxing, boxing, and more boxing. It's all in my files.



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Special kudos this time to SduP, perhaps the only person acknowledged in all issues of MCBF and once more chief proofreader (despite impending son #2). No doubt my usual last minute changes have undone much of her good work. But she tried. Other tips of the Marr "America's Most Wanted" cap go out to "TS"A, V/S, MW, JB & LP (this issue's scanner), the Ds, the Gs, ML, KB, DC, SF, MW, KC, AR, CS, TB, and various other sundry long-suffering souls.

cover art by Chuck Sperry

THE SOCCER KILLING FIELDS

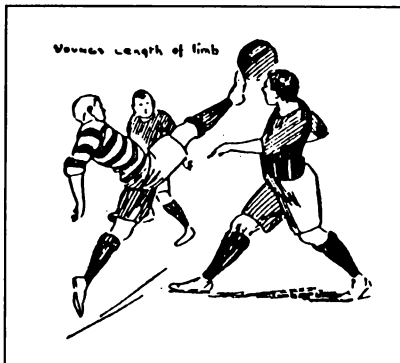
Scottish Style

Over the years, football, or as Americans insist on calling it, soccer, has become synonymous with sporting slaughter. This seemingly mild game of kicking a ball into a net is without peer in its ability to inspire homicidal frenzy among participants and turn normally sensible, civilized spectators into a mob of mayhem-minded maniacs, intent on killing each other or at least the referee.¹ To this, add the occasional player killed by an inadvertently well-placed kick and the periodic plane crash wiping out an entire team lock, stock, and ballboy. The result, my friends, is the stuff of true sporting entertainment.

Soccer is far from the only sport that livens things up with an occasional corpse. But outside of boxing and motor-racing, sports-related fatalities are depressingly rare. Most happy-faced sports historians and journalists (is there any other kind?) can easily gloss over, or even outright ignore, the lethal side of their favorite jock cult. Few NFL histories bother to mention the half dozen players who've given their lives for the game. Baseball writers are equally coy about the rare, but hardly non-existent, on-field fatalities and crowd mishaps that have marred the "National Pastime."

It doesn't work this way with soccer. It's the one game where the slaughter is inescapable. The carnage is so colorful, the body counts so mindboggling, the violence so deeply embedded in the very fabric of the game that not even the most dewy-eyed sporting lunatic can ignore it.

Consider the simple crowd riot. In other sports, they're widely bemoaned but quickly forgotten anomalies. In soccer, they're almost a cherished institution. Few soccer teams outside the US lack an ample supply of hooligans cheering them on when things go well and beating the crap out of the other side's hooligans when they don't. No self respecting major soccer stadium lacks a full gamut of anti-riot paraphernalia. Moats and fences surround the field. Stout barriers separate rival factions in the stands. Full contingents of riot police are on call. Despite these precautions, the sight of a beleaguered referee fleeing a mob of irate fans is one of the great soccer clichés. Crowd disturbances are as much a part of the game as the corner kick.



To the antics of its unruly fans, soccer adds an ample supply of every other form of sporting mayhem from on-field fatalities to full-scale warfare. No history of soccer is complete without such highlights as the 1958 Munich plane crash that wiped out most of Manchester United, the leading English team of its day;² the 1964 Peru/Argentina Olympic qualifier where a disallowed Peruvian goal sparked a riot and stampede killed 350 people, and above all, the 1969 World Cup qualifying matches between El Salvador and Honduras. First came the riots, then the severed diplomatic relations, and finally the invasion. The short-lived, but no less legendary "Soccer War" began with Salvadorian tanks rolling into Honduras. By the time of the cease-fire four days later, an estimated 2,000 people

¹ My grandfather saw a soccer game in a World War II POW camp end when the players stomped the referee to death after an especially bad call.

² Fans of rival teams still greet Manchester United with chants of "Munich '58"

were dead.

In this wild, woolly, and wonderfully bloody world, one small city stands out: Glasgow, Scotland. The population of this gritty seaport on Scotland's west coast barely tops 650,000. But Glaswegians more than compensate for their small numbers with their passion. Many of the violent and lethal traditions so central to the game--the fan riot, the stadium collapse--were pioneered, if not invented, in Glasgow in the early 1900s. Nor have the good folk of the city rested on their laurels. For more than 100 years, Glasgow has supported a level of soccer-related mayhem that is the envy of cities a dozen times its size. Glasgow may no longer be the #2 city of the British Empire, but it will always be number one in the hearts of a certain breed of soccer fan.

The action centers on the city's two biggest teams: Rangers and Celtic (pronounced Seltic). The pair have dominated Scottish soccer for more than a century, winning some 75% of the various championships and cups. Celtic once won the league title nine years in a row, a record the Rangers finally tied last season (96/97). Whenever these two teams take the field, there's usually some stupid title or silly cup at stake. But the spice that makes this natural rivalry quite possibly the most heated and violent in the world is sectarianism. Celtic, in their green & white hoop striped jerseys, are an unabashedly Catholic team, with deep, powerful Irish roots. The blue-shirted Rangers are their polar opposites: fiercely Protestant, staunchly Scottish, and deeply supportive of Ulster (where do you think all those Protestants in Northern Ireland came from?). Fan splits along sectarian lines are common in British soccer; along the Mersey, Catholics follow Liverpool while Protestants support cross-town rivals Everton. In Manchester, it's Catholics for United and Protestants for City. But nowhere is the division as vehement and bitterly pronounced as Glasgow. When the Rangers and Celtic take the field, it's like a wee bit o' Belfast on the banks of the Clyde.

The unique sectarian dynamic that so

spices a Rangers/Celtic match is rooted deep in Scottish history. During the Protestant Reformation, few countries so effectively converted, kicked out, and/or killed the local Catholic population as Scotland. By the dawn of the 19th century, Glasgow boasted of a Catholic population of 39 souls --not even enough to go around for the 43 anti-Catholic *societies* in town. This ended in the early 1800s as wave after wave of Irish immigrants crossed the Irish Sea. Glasgow became home to a large Irish Catholic population living in virtual apartheid from the Scottish Presbyterian majority. Although most overt divisions and discrimination have since diminished in Scottish society (after all, it's not Northern Ireland), Scotland still maintains two separate but equal public school systems: one Protestant, one Catholic.

Early soccer teams were primarily Protestant. But, as the game became *the* passion of the working class, Catholic soccer teams were inevitable. Glasgow Celtic was founded in 1887 by Irish immigrants to help support Catholic charities. (One of the founders' goals was to keep indigent Catholics away from heretical sermons in Protestant soup kitchens!) The team was successful from the first. They quickly eclipsed other Irish/Catholic teams in Scotland and became one of the strongest clubs in the country. After dumping the charity nonsense in favor of a strictly for-profit policy, they pioneered open professionalism in Scotland. Among the several Protestant teams about Glasgow, only one met the challenge of the upstart Irish: the Rangers.

Since 1887, the clubs have met over 400 times in what is arguably the bitterest rivalry in sports. From reading match reports, it seems the series has been played in a continual hail of bottles, rivets, and brickbats from the terraces.³ Game accounts

³ The large standing-room only sections that formerly graced all UK stadiums. They have since been banned from larger stadia after being implicated in one soccer disaster too many--a

are so rife with pitch invasions, fan clashes, assaults on the referees, and riots major and minor, it's a miracle most games have gone to time. As far back as 1902, one writer compared the atmosphere at a Rangers/Celtic match unfavorably to that of a rat pit.⁴ Consider the following far from unusual examples of soccer spectating, Glasgow style:

1905: After a Celtic player was ordered off for kicking a Ranger, Celtic supporters stormed out of the stands, intent on blood. The Celtic captain personally rescued the referee. A Celtic director pleading with the crowd for order was pelted with stones. Somehow, the game resumed, but was quickly halted when fans continued to attack players.

1941: Two injured Celtic players had already been carried off with no penalty being called. Finally, the referee called a flagrant foul against the Rangers, but the Ranger goalie managed to stop the ensuing penalty kick. Celtic fans pelted the field with bottles. The players had to take shelter in the goals. The Scottish League punished the Celtic fans by closing their stadium for a month. A Celtic director protested because the fans hadn't done anything until they'd started throwing bottles.

1966: Chaos surrounded the Scottish Cup and League Cup games between the two teams. Over 70 supporters were arrested, a policeman's skull fractured by a thrown bottle, and dozens of windows broken near the stadiums. At least two fans dropped dead of apparent heart attacks in or near the stadiums. The Glasgow Constable issued a plea calling for fans to "behave like human beings" before next season's round of games.

These incidents are neither unusual nor extreme. Violence, injuries, and disturbances are not at all unexpected when



these two sides took the field. One *London Times* columnist, reminiscing about the matches in the '60s, remarked,

...there was in attendance a specially selected platoon of stretcher *bearers* trained to race along the sidelines (often passing a wing forward in full flight) as they took their latest offering to the pride of ambulances outside.

Practice, after all, makes perfect.

For all the violence--perhaps even because of it!--the matches between the two sides generate the most lucrative gates in Scotland. Cynics recognized the undeniable commercial side and dubbed the duo the "Old Firm" at the turn of the century. Before World War I, a Celtic/Rangers match could attract 70,000, more than the day's attendance for the rest of the league combined! And via various tournaments, benefits, and other contrivances, they meet as often as ten times a season. The Old Firm holds the all-time UK regular season attendance record --118,567 in 1939 for the annual "Ne'er's Day" game. As insane as it gets in the terraces, Rangers and Celtic managers are quite chummy in the executive suite. They know they've got a good, if bloody, thing going.

Naturally, the clubs are loathe to do anything to curb their fans' zeal. Gates like

move bitterly bemoaned and denounced by fans who refuse to take their soccer sitting down.

⁴ A charming, archaic sport where people placed bets on how many rats a terrier could kill in a proscribed length of time.

these more than cover the cost of the occasional riot. And while Old Firm management carefully avoids openly supporting sectarianism, they do little to discourage it.

Celtic toyed early-on with being all-Catholic, or at least limiting heretics. But management quashed this, figuring a good team is better than a Catholic team. The club directors, however, have almost all been Catholic and not one bit shy about their Irish-Catholic roots. The tricolor of the Irish Republic flies proudly over the stands at Celtic's stadium (variously known as Parkhead and Celtic Park), which also frequently hosts Catholic-oriented events.

The Rangers are the flipside of Celtic, Protestant and Scottish where Celtic is Catholic and Irish. Only worse. For all intents and purposes the Rangers didn't sign a single Catholic player until the 1980s. The official excuse was that they just couldn't find a Catholic player good enough. Even this belated entry into the 20th century enraged a certain large and vocal element in the stands--season tickets were burned, scarves destroyed, and dozens of supporter's clubs disbanded in protest of this popish desecration of the Ranger blue. Nor was this anti-Catholic prohibition confined to the field. According to rumors, it extended clear down to the janitorial staff. Even the good Protestant player who married a non-practicing Catholic could expect a little chat in the front office. From top-level management to lower-level employees, the Rangers staff also is heavily Masonic, an order the Catholic church forbids members to join. The Rangers homefield, Ibrox Stadium, often hosts Masonic and nationalistic events, and is the staging ground for the annual Orange Walk.⁵

Team & Fan Nicknames

(complimentary and derogatory)

<i>Celtic</i>	<i>Rangers</i>
Dirty Fenian	Dirty Orange
Sons of Satan	Forces of Darkness
Tims	Huns
Papists	Billy Boys
The B'hoys	The 'Gers
'Tic	Teddy Bears

Further deepening this sectarian divide is that long-standing bogeyman of British politics: Ireland. The Irish question has triggered wars, brought down governments, and inspired an impressive number of riots, bombs, and assassinations. So it should be no surprise that it can do a lot for a soccer rivalry. Although Old Firm management carefully avoids taking official sides in the "Troubles"--Celtic, for example, doesn't stage charity matches for the IRA --this doesn't stop the fans. Outside Parkhead, intense young men wearing green hand out crudely printed IRA flyers, while at Ibrox, the fare is grimy Ulster Defense Association (UDA) literature. And inside the stadium, it takes no great insight to perceive that a good chunk of the crowd sees the game as Ulster (or Northern Ireland, depending on your politics) by proxy. As historian Bill Murray notes

No one watching a Ranger/Celtic match could come away from it under the illusion that all he had been to was a football game. One side of the ground is a sea of green and white, sprinkled with the tricolor of the Irish Republic; on the other, a mass of red, white and blue scarves set against a vigorous waving of Union Jacks... from one comes rebel songs in praise of the Republic, backed up by chants denouncing the UDA; from the other come songs in praise of being up to one's knees in Fenian⁶ blood, recalling the glories of the Sash and the victory at Boyne, and backed up by chants of an

⁵ In 1690, Protestant William III of Orange defeated the forces of deposed Catholic James II at the Battle of Boyne, ensuring that England would remain Protestant. The Orange Lodge was founded by Irish Protestants in 1795 to commemorate this great victory over popery. They celebrate by marching on "Orange Day" wearing orange sashes ("The Sash"). It's the

Protestant answer to St. Patrick's Day. It has triggered Protestant/Catholic violence in Northern Ireland (natch!), Scotland, and even New York City!

⁶ A 19th century Irish revolutionary group.

uncomplimentary nature about the pope and the IRA.

A Scottish joke is that in Glasgow the definition of an atheist is someone who goes to Old Firm games for the soccer.

The singing, chanting mobs on either end include some of the most fanatical fans on the planet. The section of stands at Celtic Park home ground housing their most ardent supporters is nicknamed "The Jungle." One player noted "I have known players scared to go near the Jungle to collect the ball." Celtic fans are noted for their paranoia. No matter how successful their team is, there is always the lingering suspicion that, if not for the plotting by the powers that be, even greater honors would be theirs. Typically, one fan entitled a chapter in his memoirs "The First Disallowed Goal."

Where Celtic fans are paranoid, the Rangers fans are arrogant, smug in their and their team's innate superiority, and prone to violence when events indicate otherwise. While Celtic has some Protestant fans, Catholics are a far rarer breed on the blue end of the field with its legions of skinheads and yahoo Unionists. With the more loyal (the Glasgow saying goes, "Rangers fans are loyal, Celtic fans are faithful") Rangers fans teaching their preschoolers lyrics to songs like "The Billy Boys" (see sidebar), it's not too hard to see why. And yes, there are left-wing soccer fans in Glasgow. But they avoid the Old Firm Crip/Blood action entirely, preferring to support Patrick Thistle, a smaller, non-sectarian local club.

The chanting and singing at on Old Firm game disabuses any quaint notion of "Can't we all just get along?" Some are merely threatening: "Oh there won't be many going home" (to the tune of "She'll be Coming 'Round the Mountain") and the ever popular and unimaginative "You're gonna get your fucking heads kicked in" in response to an opposition goal. Others are positively inflammatory. In addition to picking on the peccadilloes and miscues of opposing players, things get quite personal. Envision thousands of Rangers fans chanting in unison "UDA all the way/ Fuck the Pope and the IRA", with the Celtic end roaring

The Billy Boys

(To tune of "Marching Through Georgia")

Hello, Hello

We are the Billy Boys

Hello, hello

You'll know us by our noise

For we're up to our knees in Fenian blood

Surrender or you'll die

For we are the Bridgeton Billy Boys

back with "IRA all the way/ Fuck the Queen and the UDA." The Bobby Sands hunger strike provided Rangers fans with plentiful material, while the Celtic chants about Rev. Ian Paisley (a prominent pro-British Ulsterman) are far from complimentary. Only one chant can unite the two sides: "If you hate the Glasgow Polis (police) clap your hands." When Glasgow fathers pat their sons on the head and slip them a few pounds for the match, they admonish their sons, not to stay out of trouble, but "tae get tore in"--roughly "Get your licks in." It's no wonder that, as one columnist wrote:

..everyone remembers the day their father/
uncle/ brother/ son was hospitalized after an
Old Firm game.

Optimists on both sides claim that overt sectarianism in Glasgow is a thing of the past; outside the football ground, the two sides get along just fine. But it's still there. Early in the 95/96 season, a young Celtics supporter walking through a heavily Rangers neighborhood after a match was beaten to death. Local residents put up an informal memorial consisting of flowers and Celtic and Ranger football scarves, symbolically tied together. Parties unknown quickly destroyed this blasphemous display, untying the scarves and throwing the flowers into a dustbin.

THE RIOTS

Oddly enough, in the first great British soccer riot, the Glasgow mob more or less cast aside their sectarian differences to unite against high ticket prices. The occasion of this historic event was the replay of the 1909

Scottish Cup final between (who else?) Rangers and Celtic on the neutral ground of Hampden Park (Scotland's national stadium) in Glasgow. The match the previous weekend had ended in a 2-2 tie, dictating a second match the following weekend. According to a rumor printed in at least one newspaper, extra time would be played if necessary.

At the end of regulation, the score stood tied at one-all. The players remained on the field and the fans in the terraces after the final whistle, expectantly awaiting the signal for extra time. But wait--that's the rule of the *English* Football Association. Scottish rules called for a third replay! An official duly removed a corner flag. The ominous muttering of the 60,000-strong crowd steadily grew to a full-fledged roar. A single thought was in their mind. The teams were in collusion, seeking to shake their fans down for the price of yet another ticket. And the thought of coughing up a third shilling in that recession year--it galled the Scottish souls of Catholic and Protestant alike.

Within minutes after the players had left the field, the fans descended upon the pitch, heralding their advance with a shower of stones and bottles. The *London Times* noted:

Official remonstrance proved futile, and those who tried persuasion had to beat a hasty retreat before a Glasgow mob at its worst.

Police batons were equally futile at stemming the drunken human flood. The mob's first target was the goals. First one, then the other was torn down, doused with liquor, and set on fire. The crowd roared at this first taste of blood and broke into smaller groups intent on even more destruction. One gang dragged the framework of the ground roller over the field, tearing deep gouges in the turf and all but destroying the playing surface. Other detachments torched the pay boxes while the bulk of the crowd, armed with planks, stones, and bottles, simply battled with a rapidly-growing number of police and each other. It was, after all, Glasgow.

Hopelessly outmanned, the police barely held their own until reinforcements

An Appeal

The Directors of Rangers Football Club and Celtic Football Club are very seriously perturbed by the fact that in recent years the games between the Clubs have been spoiled by the misbehaviour of certain spectators, and they now make a very earnest appeal to all their followers to do everything in their power to prevent any kind of disturbance in the future, and to assist the Police in every manner possible.

Robert Kelly,
Chairman.

John F. Wilson,
Chairman.

Anti-hooligan measures, 1954

(including a full contingent of mounted officers) arrived. Eventually, some 200 policemen battled with the rioters. They managed to beat the mob back and save the main stand from arson, but the smaller fires burned freely--rioters stood on the hoses of firemen trying to extinguish the blazes. It took more than three hours to restore order. The cops only managed to arrest three people--the rioters had been quite effective at freeing their fellows from police custody. At least 45 cops and 85 spectators were injured. In the aftermath, with the atmosphere in Glasgow ugly and the national stadium a mess, the Scottish Football Association voted against a third match. But it was close; 11 (out of 26) of the nitwits in charge favored yet another game. But saner heads prevailed. The Scottish Cup was not awarded that year.

The next great riot came 71 years later under similar conditions. Again, it was Rangers vs. Celtic in the 1980 Cup Final at Hampden. The game had been relatively trouble free, with no major refereeing gaffes. The atmosphere was so calm that in the waning moments of the match, most of the police stationed inside the stadium took up posts outside to control the exiting crowds. This time, there would be a winner. Unfortunately, in the minds of Rangers fans, it was the wrong one--Celtic, scoring the winning goal in overtime.

Excited by their triumph, Celtic fans climbed over the fence surrounding the field to congratulate their heroes. With no police to stop them, more and more Tims, triumphantly waving their green & white scarves, scrambled onto the field. It was a sight reeking of popery that no Billy could abide. Like a blue-jerseyed, bottle-throwing army, the blue-clad mob swarmed down from the terraces to do battle. And did the green line waver? No. Shouting "Get stuck intae them Orange-Masonic bastards", the Tims engaged their hereditary enemy. Like the Sharks and the Jets 3000 miles removed from Spanish Harlem, the rumble was on. For 15 minutes, the nationally televised battle raged up and down the pitch. It took a small army of mounted police (and the first baton charge since the 1926 Glasgow General Strike!) to separate the Montagues and Capulets of Scottish soccer. The final tally: 50 injuries, 210 arrests, and a permanent ban on alcohol--not only in the stands, but on the omnipresent supporter's clubs buses en route to matches.

THE KILLING

The scene: an Old Firm game at Ibrox in 1931. Early in the 2nd half of a scoreless draw, a Ranger forward streaked towards a ball in front of the goal. The only player between him and a sure score was Celtic goalkeeper John Thomson. At 22, Thomson was already a star, the beloved "Prince of Goalkeepers" to the Jungle fans and the goalie for the Scottish national team. He raced out from the goal mouth to intercept the Ranger forward. With a casual disregard for his own safety, he dived directly at the ball, intent on snatching it away. As his brother later recalled, Thomson had been injured in this way before. He would be so focused he only saw the ball. Thomson probably never even saw the knee swinging straight at his head.

Even as Thomson collapsed on the pitch with blood pouring from his head, the ball sailed safely out of bounds. A sudden silence gripped the Celtic end. Rangers fans, however, roared their approval of the fallen

Tim. They continued to cheer until the Ranger captain ran to the sidelines and implored them to shut up. Thomson was carried unconscious from the field and play resumed. The game went to full time, ending in a scoreless draw before an eerily silent crowd. Thomson's injury was so plainly an accident there weren't even the usual post-game disturbances.

Thomson would never regain consciousness. He died that night at 9:00.

The John Thomson Song

A young lad named John Thomson
From the west of Fife he came
To play for Glasgow Celtic,
And build himself a name.

On the fifth day of September
'gainst the Rangers club he played,
From defeat he save the Celtic
Ah but what a price he paid

The ball rolled from the centre,
Young John ran out and dived,
The ball rolled by; young John lay still,
For his club this hero died.

I took a trip to Parkhead,
To the dear old Paradise,
And as the players came out,
Sure the tears fell from my eyes.

For a famous face was missing,
From the green & white brigade,
And they told me Johnny Thomson,
His last game he had played.

Farewell my darling Johnny,
Prince of players we must part,
No more we'll stand and cheer you,
On the slopes of Celtic Park.

Now the fans they all are silent,
As they travel near and far,
No more they'll cheer John Thomson
Our bright and shining star.

So come all you Glasgow Celtic,
Stand up and play the game
For between your posts there stands a
ghost
Johnny Thomson is his name.

The papers noted

the manner of his death is typical of a man who knew no fear and bravely did his part for his side.

His death triggered an incredible outpouring of grief. Both teams canceled their next matches. The *Glasgow Observer* published a piece of doggerel in the style of the Scotch Laureate, the Great MacGonagal that began: "In the heart of the Shamrock he stands/ The laddie with the magical hands..." The funeral overwhelmed Thomson's hometown of Cardenden. Some 30,000 people descended on the small village. Many unemployed Celtic fans (a common commodity in 1931) had walked the 55 miles from Glasgow. His teammates were the pallbearers, and the mourners a Who's Who of Scottish soccer, including a full complement of Rangers players and executives. Even the Rangers Supporter's Clubs sent a nice wreath.

Nor has Thomson's memory died. Unlike America, where a dead star is a forgotten star⁷, Celtic fans hold the memory of their star keeper dear. "The John Thomson Song" (see previous page) remains in the Jungle repertoire to this day. Some 57 years after the fact, a steady stream of Celtic fans continue to make the pilgrimage to his grave.

The punchline is that Celtic's greatest martyr was a practicing Protestant.

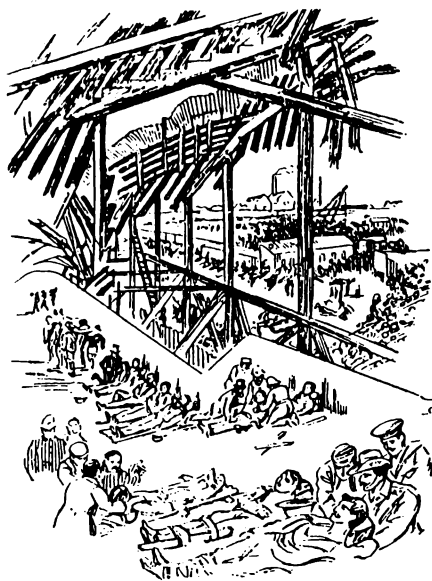
MASS CARNAGE AT IBROX

Thanks to the rickety, poorly designed stadia that house so many of the world's soccer teams, and the temperamental and excitable nature of the fans crowding them, collapses and stampedes are one of soccer's more illustrious traditions. On any list of sporting crowd disasters, at least eight of the top ten will be soccer-related. And it all

began in 1902 at Ibrox.

For a change, the carnage wasn't at an Old Firm game. It was the one match capable of causing even greater excitement and a larger gate than Rangers vs. Celtic: Scotland vs. the "auld enemy", England. Even today, Old Firm fans ditch their Irish tricolors (Celtic) and Union Jacks (Rangers) in favor of banners reading "Remember Bannockburn" and "1317"⁸ for the one thing that can bring them together: the Scottish National Team.

The crowds began arriving around noon. By the 3:30 kick-off, the stadium was filled to capacity with at least 75,000 people. It didn't take long for disaster to strike. Without the slightest warning, during the first half, as fans shifted and swayed to follow a charge along the flanks, part of the iron framework of a hastily-erected section of wooden terracing behind the west goal gave way. In virtual silence, a huge hole



The first soccer disaster

⁷ Go ahead, try it. I bet the average Cleveland Indian fan doesn't even know who Ray Chapman (their great star shortstop killed by a pitch in 1920) was. (See MCBF #7).

⁸ Robert Bruce's victory over the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1317 led to Scottish independence, at least for a while

suddenly opened up, collapsing "like a trap door." This gaping maw swallowed several hundred fans in an instant. Officials quickly stopped the match to allow bodies to be carted off to the morgue or hospital as appropriate. In all, 26 people were killed and more than 500 injured in the world's first great soccer disaster.

And the game? As soon as most of the dead and injured were removed, action resumed. Officials were mindful of the temper of the Glasgow mob even then. The match went to full time without any further incident, ending in a 1-1 draw. Spectators even filled up the still-standing portion of the damaged terrace! As anthropologist Desmond Morris noted in his discussion of this inaugural tragedy in his book *The Soccer Tribe*, "It takes more than death and disaster to put the Soccer Tribesman off his game."

Incredibly, lightning struck at Ibrox yet again almost 69 years later. It was on January 2, 1971 at the annual "Ne'er's Day" Old Firm match, traditionally the most drunken, most violent, and most heavily attended League match of the year. Within minutes of the final whistle, Ibrox became quite possibly the only stadium in the world to host two world-class disasters.

The match that day hadn't lived up to expectations on or off the field. This was partly due to the attendance--since crowd troubles in 1966, the capacity of Ibrox had been limited to 80,000. And surprisingly, the crowd behaved themselves. Save for a handful of minor incidents, the game had been played in a generally calm and sporting, if drunken, atmosphere. Newspapers described it as the best-behaved Old Firm crowd in years.

No doubt part of the crowd's complacency was due to the game, a scoreless draw going into the final moments with nary a bad call or disallowed goal to make the bottles fly. Then, with barely two minutes to play, Celtic scored. A great gloom gripped the Rangers end. With the blue & white scarves drooping, the Billys slowly started to make their way to the exits. What happened next was completely

uncharacteristic of the game.

Unlike basketball or American football, soccer is not noted for last minute heroics and wild finishes. Yet somehow, with what must have only been seconds left in injury time, the Rangers miraculously scored an equalizer. The sight of the gaily checkered ball bouncing about in the back of the net galvanized the Ranger stands in an instant. And nowhere was the enthusiasm as great as among the "bouncy boys" in the Eastern Enclosure terracing. The frenzied celebration that broke out at this once-in-a-lifetime miracle almost defies description.

The excitement was tremendous. There was jubilation. They were singing, shouting, jumping up and down, waving their arms. The terracing was in an uproar. I would say it was football mania at its highest.

Thus testified the Glasgow police chief at the subsequent inquest. Coming from a veteran of many an Old Firm match, this should be taken as an expert opinion.

Within minutes, a jubilant wave of supporters began to pour out of the Eastern Enclosure. It is unclear just what the rush was--could it have been perilously near pub closing time? Whatever the reason, conditions quickly became a near-stampede. Cresting the stadium, the human tide began to descend towards Cairnlea Drive down what should be the most famous flight of stairs in soccer: Stairway 13.

Stairway 13 is nothing special. It's just a long, broad flight of stairs equipped with six sets of handrails. It leads straight down to the street, interrupted only by a narrow landing every 16 steps or so. As simple and foolproof as this sounds, it was woefully inadequate to its task of getting untold thousands of inebriated soccer fans out of Ibrox in one piece, especially those coming from the section of terracing home to the most enthusiastic support. For the past decade, accidents at Stairway 13 had been regular occurrences. After a 1961 mishap that killed two, Ranger officials replaced the old wooden stairs with concrete. It didn't help. There was another accident in 1967, and in 1969 a railing collapsed, injuring 21. No big deal. The Rangers had won that day,

HAIL BRITANNIA: HOME OF THE GREAT SOCCER DISASTERS

April 15, 1989 Liverpool vs. Nottingham Forest, Hillsborough Stadium, Sheffield. 94 dead, 174 injured: Police over-do their efforts at herding Liverpool's notorious followers into the terracing before a Cup match at an ostensibly neutral stadium. Between the over-enthusiastic policing and poor signage, two sections become jammed. Even as room remained in adjacent terraces, the crowd overflowed, crushing the unfortunates in front against the fencing surrounding the field. The disaster led to a ban on terracing in major stadiums.

May 29, 1985 Brussels, Belgium: Liverpool fans attack Juventas (Italy) supporters before the start of an European Champion's Cup Final. The inevitable stampede causes a retaining wall to collapse. 39 die--32 of whom are Italian supporters.

May 11, 1985 Bradford, England: fire, 56 dead: In the last game prior to a major stadium upgrade, years' worth of accumulated rubbish beneath the stands catches fire. The blaze quickly consumes an antiquated wooden grandstand and claims a heavy toll among the sell-out crowd.

March 9, 1946: Bolton Wanderers vs. Stoke City, Burden Park, Bolton. 33 dead, 400+ injured Shortly before the start of a Cup match, a wall separating two sections of terracing collapses, triggering a stampede.

and a Glasgow cop noted

They seem happy enough. They are not hurt bad and they were Ranger supporters, d'ye ken?

Victory over Celtic--the ultimate analgesic balm.

Like so many mishaps, exactly how it happened remains unclear. Most popular

accounts place the blame on those less than loyal fans who'd left after Celtic scored. Supposedly, when they heard their fellow Billys roaring over the 'Gers goal, they'd reversed field, only to run headlong into the exiting mass. However, this charming little scenario ("the goal that killed 66 people") contradicts testimony at the inquest.

One witness claimed to see a young man carrying a raincoat trip halfway down the stairs. Another blamed a small boy taking a tumble. A third said the first to fall was a man carrying a small boy on his shoulders. Yet another finger-pointer pinned it on two boys bending down to pick up a Rangers scarf and an anorak they'd thrown in the air.

Whatever. All agreed on what happened next. The surge of humanity that had all but filled the stairway to the bursting point was suddenly transformed into a raging torrent of people tumbling and pouring down the stairs. "I saw them falling just as if a hole appeared in the ground..."

One fellow, at 190 lbs. no lightweight, told the court:

There were bodies to the front of me and to the back of me and bodies on top of me...we were all pressing down and you could feel yourself getting lifted off your feet. I felt myself going and I got my arm up, then the next minute there was a bang and a banister to my left went. Everyone flew forward. I seemed to fly through the air and I landed on top of the bodies. I went 15 feet through the air.

Another described the chaotic scene as "...like a river that burst its banks."

According to yet another survivor, "The pile of human beings was four people deep, bursting the sides of the railing." The pressure of the cascading bodies had twisted the heavy metal handrails like spaghetti and torn and uprooted them from the concrete. 53 people, mostly men in their 20's and 30's, were dead at the scene. Another thirteen would be DOA at the hospital, bringing the total of what would be the worst UK soccer disaster for 19 years to 66 dead, and 145 injured. Rangers supporters all, they had died of suffocation and/or asphyxiation. Many of the bodies were so

battered and bruised they were identified by their tattoos. In a fun sidenote, two of the dead had criminal records related to anti-Catholic activities; one had even gone to jail for torching a church.

But such is the temper of the Old Firm rivalry, the instinctive response of Protestant Glaswegians to the question "Did you hear about the disaster at Ibrox?" was "Oh no. They didn't beat us, did they?"

Research Can Be Fun

Most of the research for this article was done the usual way: burrowing through libraries, rummaging through bookstores and catalogs, and staring at microfilm until my eyes bled. The biggest irony was that I *wasn't* able to locate the *Reader's Digest* article that first piqued my interest during my grossly misspent youth. Some rocks remain unturned, I guess.

I supplemented the bookworm stuff with The Internet and (gasp!) conversations with real live people. Unfortunately, I know few soccer fans, and I wasn't about to buttonhole the thug I spotted in front of my post office wearing a Rangers jacket with "Catholic Killer" proudly emblazoned across the back. (Really in the middle of San Francisco!) However, Scottish expats Ramsey of AK (a Stirling Albion supporter) and Allan of *Drop Out* zine (scion of a Rangers family) provided lots of helpful background information.

I emailed the owners of some Rangers/Celtic web sites. The first few (all Ranger fans) were gracious and helpful. However, a Celtic fan went to the trouble of tracking down some of my stuff on the web and refused to answer (I guess they really are paranoid). He objected to my "trashy US tabloid style." And he told me that he'd spread the word among Celtic & Ranger web site owners, and I could expect (and indeed got) no further cooperation from anyone. So I had to do it without them. Touchy, touchy, eh?

Whacky Nicknames

One of my favorite aspects of sports is the team nicknames and/or mascots, the whackier the better. Who could not be thrilled at the prospect of seeing a game played by the Macon Whoopees (minor league baseball) or the Spirits of St. Louis (ABA basketball)?

However the real creativity is at the colleges. Most schools are, as you expect, boring. Number one on the list is the Eagles, with various large cats and Indian variants dominating the top 10 list. But some schools are more original, or just plain irrational. Isn't it wonderful to know the late President Nixon played football for the Whittier Poets?

Anteaters (*UC Irvine*)
 Arabs (*Imperial College*)
 Bloodhounds (*John Jay College*)
 Blue Hose (*Presbyterian College*)
 Bullets (*Gettysburg College*)
 Camels (*Campbell U.*)
 Clansmen (*Behaven College--it's Scottish!*)
 Diplomats (*Franklin & Marshall College*)
 Fighting Blue Hens (*U. of Delaware*)
 Fighting Parsons (*Nyack College*)
 Gentlemen (*Centenary College*)
 Gorillas (*Pittsburgh State U.*)
 Gothics (*Jersey City State J.C.*)
 Hustlin' Quakers (*Earlham College*)
 Ichabods (*Washburn U.*)

Kangaroos (*Austin College*)
 Keelhaulers (*California Maritime Academy*)
 Leathernecks (*Western Illinois U.*)
 Magicians (*Le Moyne-Owen College*)
 Moles (*Nazareth College*)
 Monks (*St. Joseph's College*)
 Peacocks (*St. Peter's College*)
 Penguins (*Dominican College*)
 Poets (*Whittier College*)
 Savages (*S.E. Oklahoma State*)
 Squirrels (*Mary Baldwin College*)
 Terrors (*Western Maryland College*)
 Vandals (*U. of Idaho*)
 Weevils (*U. of Arkansas @ Monticello*)
 Wonder Boys (*Arkansas Technical U.*)

Gangway!

The Day the Escalator Munched Children

Of the many measures major league baseball clubs resort to fill those empty seats, perhaps the most odious are those that offer free admission to children. Promotions like "Little League Day" can turn the most staid "green cathedral" into a raving Bedlam. It's not a pretty sight. Hordes of youngsters, driven into a hyperkinetic frenzy by the combination of tedious on-field action and near-clinical overdoses of soft drinks and chocolate malteds, rampage unchecked. By the third inning, even the firmest parent gives up any semblance of control over their ill-mannered offspring and seeks solace from the nearest beer vendor. By the seventh-inning stretch, every square inch of the stands is coated with a sticky, crunchy coating of spilled cola and discarded peanut shells. The restrooms, overwhelmed by the frequent demands of pre-pubescent bladders, take on the stench of open sewers. A faint odor of vomit hangs over the park.

Thus, chaos was to be expected when the Baltimore Orioles hosted "School Safety Patrol Day" for their game against the Cleveland Indians on May 2, 1964. Some 12,600 crossing guards from the surrounding counties descended on Memorial Stadium for the event. And the stadium was totally unprepared.

The youthful mob and their ostensible chaperones quickly filled the late Memorial Stadium's lower levels. Forty minutes before game time, the top deck was opened to handle the overflow. Orioles workers fired up the escalators, newly installed for this season. The kids immediately piled on, riding three or four to a step in their frenzy to be among the first to rampage through

virgin territory.

Unfortunately, someone goofed. One of the escalators was still configured for people leaving the park. At the top, there was a movable barrier which narrowed the width of the escalator's exit from 40" to 28". This was to ensure people going down would get on one at a time. But with the escalator in "up" mode and crammed handrail-to-handrail with overly excited children, it was a lethal bottleneck. Whoops!

Some of the kids in front were able to safely squeeze through the narrow exit. But within minutes, the hordes of crossing guards disgorged from the escalator had become a screaming pile of children hopelessly clogging the exit. The kids stopped moving, but the escalator didn't.

The stairs kept on going, brutally scoring and tearing at their trapped load. As one teacher described the scene to the newspapers:

People were pushing from behind. People at the top lost their balance. There was a jam at the top. People just kept getting chewed up by the steps.

But for the actions of a quick thinking usher and a handy emergency stop switch, dozens of crossing guards could have been shredded to ribbons. But even so, it was a gory, chaotic scene. Blood, shoes, candy, and grease-stained bits of clothing were everywhere. Forty six children were injured, several seriously. At the bottom of the pile, rescuers found one 14-year old girl dying of a head injury. And many of the children brought home highly unusual souvenirs of a day at the ballpark: impressive collections of cuts, bruises and scratches in an unmistakable "escalator tread" pattern.



THE GREAT BIG GAME DISASTER

or

THE FEARSOME FATE OF THE FREELOADING FANS

By most measures of violence and chaos, the United States stands head and shoulders above the rest of the industrialized world. We have the most serial killers, the deadliest streets, and the highest crime rate this side of the Industrial Revolution. Yet this propensity for chaos inexplicably stops at the turnstiles of our sports stadiums. In an ocean of turmoil, American sporting events have traditionally been oases of safety and civility.

In other countries, the action on the field

is frequently outstripped by the goings-on in the stands. The foreign sporting press is rich with dramatic tales of pitched brawls, full-scale riots, lemming-like stampedes and of course, the always photogenic massive structural failures. Contrast these chills and thrills to the shabbily soporific spectacle of Game

Day, USA. The supporters arrive at the spacious, well-designed stadium with nary a thrown bottle or broken window. A mind-numbing atmosphere of good-hearted cheer prevails. Despite copious consumption of alcoholic beverages, the "tailgate parties" in parking lots are marked by nothing worse than an over enthusiastic celebrant passing out in a pool of his own vomit. Ordinarily unruly and unmanageable Americans peacefully file through the turnstiles (they don't even push and shove!) and go to their assigned seats as though they've been heavily sedated. No matter how heated the competition, the exuberance of their support seldom goes beyond "The Wave" and a few half-hearted aspersions about the ancestry and eyesight of the officials. They exit

quietly when time is called, causing nothing worse than a traffic jam on nearby streets. So starved are sportswriters for true action, it takes but a single well-aimed bottle to trigger a national debate over impending anarchy in the lower-level reserved.

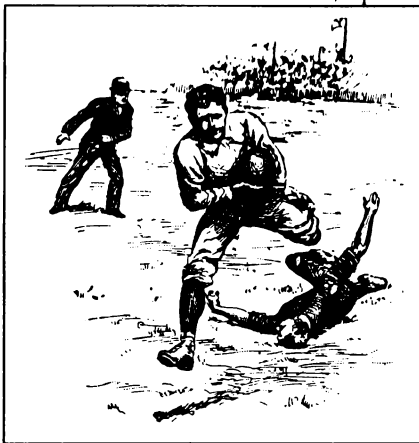
Certainly the embarrassingly low death-rate of American fans is a blot on the national character. But the country can point with pride to one shining moment, one small area where we really are number one. Elsewhere, sports fans have been gassed,

trampled, crushed, and mowed down with machine guns. But America can lay claim to what is probably the grisliest, most painful, and by far the most bizarre fate ever to befall spectators at a sporting event.

Thanksgiving Day, 1900 dawned cool and clear in San Francisco. From the sandy wastes

surrounding the Cliff House to the genteel prosperity of Rincon Hill, the odors of slowly roasting turkeys from 10,000 homes and restaurants filled the crisp autumn air. But for many, the most keenly anticipated event of the day was far from hearth and home. For today was the day of, not just any big game, but *the* "Big Game." The University of California football team was coming over from Berkeley to clash with Stanford University on the neutral grounds of the city's Recreation Park that afternoon. It was tenth installment of one of the oldest and what was rapidly becoming the most storied football rivalry on the Pacific coast.

As the only major universities in the San Francisco area, the two schools were natural rivals. But the antipathy between the two



universities went far beyond a happy accident of geographical proximity. California was an egalitarian public school, chartered by the legislature; Stanford was an elite private institution, founded by one of the state's most notorious robber barons. Berkeley was but a short streetcar ride away from the thriving industrial city of Oakland; Stanford was in Palo Alto, then a comparatively rural outpost. Berkeley dated back to 1868; Stanford merely to 1891. Berkeley fielded a squad made up almost completely of native Californians. The *Oakland Tribune* described them as "university from crown to toe...(with) not a hint of the migratory player in their ranks." Stanford, on the other hand, drew players from all over the country. "Somehow," the *Tribune* sniffed, "one feels under the 'Varsity varnish is the smear of professionalism." There was little love lost between the two schools.

Further inflaming passions this year was a still-fresh brawl that remains prominent in both school's official mythologies. At the 1899 California/Stanford baseball game at Recreation Park, Stanford fans, smug in their nine's commanding lead, amused themselves by chopping up blue & gold ribbons (the California colors) with a large woodsman's ax. This enraged the Berkeley sections. Not even Cal's 9th inning come-from-behind victory could mollify them. Scarcely had the winning run crossed the plate when the California men poured out of the stands and swung into action. When the dust cleared, they were fleeing the park in proud possession of the Stanford Ax, with most of the Stanford contingent in hot pursuit.

Students of the West's two greatest universities spent the rest of the afternoon fighting a running battle for possession of the second-hand ax in the streets of San Francisco. Stanford's most violent efforts were for naught; California retained possession. Stanford made their last stand at the ferry building, where police (at their behest) carefully searched every passenger boarding a Berkeley-bound ferry. But, in a clever demonstration of undergraduate

resourcefulness, the Berkeley students evaded the blockade by catching an Oakland boat. Transferring to a streetcar on the other side of the bay, they triumphantly delivered their prize to campus. The cheap woodsman's tool was destined for immortality as an Idiotic Collegiate Totem.*

For weeks before the game, the thoughts of students at both schools revolved about little else. Practices were heavily attended, and bonfire rallies drew large, enthusiastic crowds on both campuses. Only one event slightly marred the rapidly rising school spirit and eerily foreshadowed the tragedy to come. At a varsity scrimmage in Berkeley on Monday of "Big Game Week," a section of bleachers collapsed under the rooter's club's enthusiastic weight. Dozens of students were injured, although most suffered no worse than minor cuts and bruises. The accident was forgotten before the last student limped off to the infirmary.

The excitement and anticipation of the impending gridiron clash went far beyond the student bodies of the two universities. The sporting pages of all the major local newspapers had written of little else for the previous week. Many were the journalistic praises of Stanford's powerful squad. Coached by the legendary Fielding "Hurly Up" Yost, the cardinal-clad side boasted a 6-2 record. They had earned a well-deserved nod from the local gambling fraternity. But the Berkeley eleven wasn't expected to lie down. The boys in blue & gold were 4-1-1 going into the game and could point with pride to a defense that had only yielded two points on the season. In all the bars and

* Stanford never forgave Cal the theft of their stupid ax. It remained in Berkeley for the next 30 years despite repeated attempted felonies by Stanford. Finally in 1930, a group of 21 Stanford students posing as journalists tear-gassed a group of Berkeley students returning the ax to its safe deposit box and grabbed it. With things threatening to get out of hand (what was next--machine guns?), three years later the schools agreed to make the ax a trophy (albeit one prone to mysterious disappearances) awarded to each year's winner of the Big Game.

saloons--and San Francisco was, and still is, liberally supplied with both--the number one topic of conversation was Thursday's game.

No one was neutral, not even the illiterate. On that Thanksgiving Day, every San Francisco resident, along with a major portion of the population of nearby towns, became alumnae for a day. A newspaper described the scene :

The streets were gay with streamers of blue and gold and cardinal. Every man, and every woman for that matter seemed a partisan in the pending battle of the giants of the rival colleges.

At the Ferry Building, ferry after ferry disgorged hordes of Berkeley supporters. The blue and gold-clad mobs swarmed up Market Street, hooting and hollering for their side. Meanwhile, a steady procession of trains thundered up the San Francisco Peninsula, their coaches red with Stanford rooters. The streets around the football grounds resembled a multi-colored sea of color--collegiate colors.

The students of both schools came well-supplied with talismans ensuring victory. The word on the street was that portions of the giant "C" that had so recently vanished mysteriously from the Berkeley campus were secreted somewhere in the Stanford rooting section. But this totem was more than offset by the California side's possession of the "Stanford Ax." It was common knowledge that the carefully guarded tool was somewhere in the Berkeley stands.

By 2:00, an estimated 19,000 fans had crammed the stands of the 16th and Folsom grounds to capacity. Newspapers later reported it being the largest sports crowd to date west of the Mississippi. Outside the park, thousands more milled in the streets, unable to obtain admission. The daring took advantage of the several tall buildings that surrounded the park. Hundreds clambered onto the roofs. No fence was too high, no watchman too diligent, no vantage point was too precarious to deny these fans their football.

Inside the grounds, emotions ran high. The university bands played and the rival

rooting sections exchanged good natured taunts and sang sprightly, light-hearted airs guaranteeing total annihilation of the other side. One especially catchy California ditty answered the question of "What will we do to the Stanfordites/ On that great day?" with "Hit 'em again, boys; Hit 'em again, boys!" The cardinal side responded with chants reminding Berkeley of their dominance in the series (Stanford had won four and tied three of the two rivals' nine previous meetings). But California could easily trump this by some early variant of the Ax cheer: "Give 'em the ax! Where? In the neck!" So absorbed were the students in their verbal sparring that the presidents of the schools managed to slip into the park and take their seats unobserved, avoiding the traditional "jollyng." All expected a great game. Rah! Rah! Rah! Zip! Boom! Ah!

Almost immediately after the opening kick off, California took control of the game. Via repeated smashes into the Stanford line, the blue & gold eleven steadily rolled up yardage. Again and again they threatened the Stanford goal. Yet somehow, when all was about to be lost, Stanford held firm, denying California each time.

About 20 minutes into the game, as California unsuccessfully attempted a field goal, a crash rang out over the grounds. For an instant, all heads turned towards the north end of the field, half expecting to see a section of stands reduced to crumpled wreckage. But no damage was apparent. A Berkeley roter, suspecting cardinal chicanery aimed at distracting the blue & gold, shouted "It's a job." The California section took up the chant. A few moments later, the crowd's undivided attention was once more focused on the game. Only the keenest observers noticed that a crowd of men and boys on the roof a building across the street had suddenly vanished.

The missing fans had been watching the game from the top of a new factory. A raised ventilator running along the length of the ridge of the corrugated iron roof offered a commanding view of the field. A newspaper photo taken earlier in the game showed this

precarious perch almost black with budget-minded football fans; later estimates had some 200 men and boys clustered on it. Unfortunately, this was a use the building's architect failed to anticipate. The ventilator was only strong enough to support its own weight. The most amazing fact about the tragedy was how long the flimsy structure had borne up under the squirming weight of a few hundred frenzied football fans.

As one attorney watching from the roof later recalled:

We could see a Berkeley player kicking the ball and all moved to watch him closely. Then the roof sprang like a gallows trap.

The corrugated iron ventilator crumpled like cardboard as the underlying bracing snapped like matchsticks. It collapsed along most of its length, sending virtually the entire mass of football fans hurtling down into the factory. Some were lucky enough to check their descent by grabbing a beam or getting tangled in the rafters. But for the bulk of the men and boys there was nothing but thin air between them and the factory floor 40 or 50 feet below.

The first ones down hit the hard brick floor with bone-shattering crashes and were promptly buried under a hail of bodies. Many of those lucky enough to land on top of these human heaps would walk out of the factory none the worse for wear except for a few bruises. Many only remembered falling and waking up in a hospital bed. One lad told a typical tale:

I dodged a policeman and climbed up on the roof of the factory. I had a bully place on the peak of the roof to see the ball game when there came a roar and I was falling. I clutched at the metal roofing as I slid, but could get nothing to hold on to and down I went. I did not know anything until some men were carrying me out of the building.

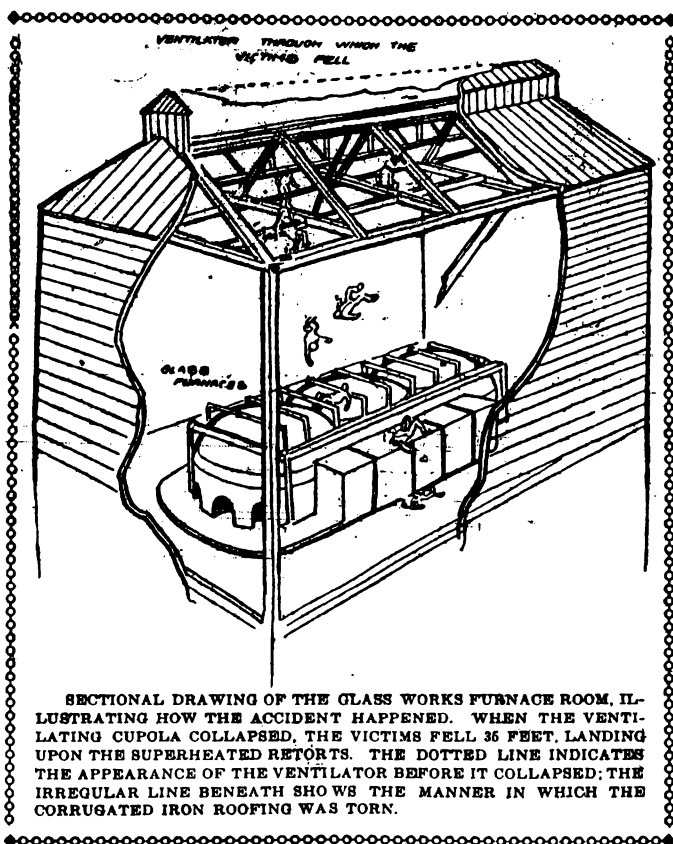
But even the most mangled and mutilated fan on the floor, broken by his fall and further crushed by piles of people heaped atop him, could bless his good fortune at avoiding an even worse fate.

The building that they were perched on was not an innocuous warehouse or a peaceful plant closed for the Thanksgiving



holiday. It housed the brand-new melt house of San Francisco and Pacific Glass Works, the largest glass manufacturing plant west of the Mississippi. Even as the fans had craned their necks to watch the action on the field, workers beneath them were in the middle of a full test melt--the last step prior to full production. Directly beneath the football fans was the closest thing San Francisco could offer in the way of Hell: a brand new, red-hot glass furnace, firing at capacity. It was filled to the brim with 15 tons of molten glass that seethed at 3000 °F.

A 9-inch thick layer of fire brick covered the furnace, sparing the fans from the novel fate of being instantly vitrified in



the viscous, glowing liquid. One worker noted their narrow escape:

If the roof of the oven was not very strong ...none of them would have lived for they would have withered in that heat like a feather in an ordinary flame. There were enough of them to fill the oven.

But the bricks themselves were a painful 500 °F, hot enough that, according to one newspaper, "a man's boots would be consumed in the time it would take him to run across the surface." The excited fans, who had only seconds earlier been happily watching a thrilling contest, found themselves literally being roasted alive.

In an instant, the peaceful scene of industrial efficiency transformed into a

bizarre mechanized charnel house. On the floor, men and boys*, at least the conscious ones, groaned from the pain of countless shattered limbs, fractured skulls, and ruptured internal organs. But loud as their cries were, they were drowned out by the shrieks of the writhing unfortunates on the furnace. The air was filled with the smell of burning clothes and roasting flesh. Iron bars over the furnace bent under the weight of the human load. A corner of the furnace cracked as blazing oil spurted out of the test ports.

The few fans who managed to grab hold of the rafters had bird's eye views of the

* The roof-top gathering appears to have been a strictly stag affair; no unequivocally female name appears on the list of dead & injured.

disaster. One such lucky fellow told the newspapers:

I found myself hanging in the air over what appeared to be a burning pit. My two companions fell upon the top of the oven and were simply roasted before my eyes...

Another survivor said:

I saw the poor fellow who had been chatting with me strike the furnace. He curled up just like a worm in that heat....

Small wonder that there were few reports of these dangling fans losing their grips and falling onto the furnace themselves. And undoubtedly, many of the men and boys who did land on the furnace set sprinting, clambering, and crawling records, despite their broken limbs, in their frantic efforts to escape the fierce heat.

Somehow, none of the glass factory crew were hit by falling football fans. They sprang into action immediately. One rushed to turn off the furnace's oil supply while the others climbed onto the platform ringing the furnace and started to drag off the dozens of screaming victims unable to make it off under their own power. Charles Jeter, a furnace tender, personally hauled eight men to safety. "We had to use our long iron pokers, with which we test the glass, to reach some of the sizzling men." Another worker said, "It was a horrible experience standing there besides a hellpot and seeing human beings roast to death." Two men were so far out of reach rescuers had to hastily improvise walkways out of some handy pine boards to reach them.

For the fans on top of the furnace, the seconds or minutes they lay there immobilized by the fierce heat were the longest of their lives. In the words of one man who survived this fiery ordeal, it was:

...as if I were lying on a roaring furnace which was roasting me alive, yet I could not have moved to save my life. Just when the torture had become unbearable I was seized from behind and dragged away from the fire and fell to the floor... A year of the most intense pain imaginable cannot compare with the agonizing torture of that terrible minute when I lay helpless on that red-hot furnace.

Another witness said:

One boy, whose first name was Willie, struck on his shoulders and back and then managed to get to his feet. I shouted to him to give me his hands, as the oven was so hot I could only reach over from the adjoining platform. His feet gave way and he fell with his head away from me. I contrived to reach his feet and so pull him away.

The accident had turned the interior of the factory into a warzone. The floor was liberally strewn with victims, many of whom had been dragged from the top of the furnace. Brains oozed from shattered skulls while blood flowed from mangled limbs. Caps and hats were scattered everywhere. One witness mentioned, "I could not walk around the furnace without stepping on the bodies of dead and injured." But scattered in the midst of this chaos and carnage were the lucky ones. One fellow, who had landed on the platform surrounding the furnace and appeared dead, suddenly picked himself up. A glass worker spotted him and told him, "You are pretty lucky." The survivor dusted himself off, replied, "You bet I am" and strolled out.

Meanwhile, inside the grounds, the bulk of the crowd remained blissfully ignorant of the tragedy unfolding just across the street. Stanford rallied in the second half, finally kicking a field goal (then worth 5 points and reportedly the first one in American intercollegiate history) in the game's waning moments for the victory. Unmindful of the horrific scene in the glass plant, one reporter wrote:

That swipe, so accurately aimed, cast a gloom over the California sections of the field which was appalling. The California girls let their flags and banners fall at half mast and the California boys whispered naughty words to themselves and shook their heads in despair.

However, a few moments later the Berkleyites recovered sufficiently to deliver an "Oski wow wow" chant that drowned out Stanford's cheers. Nor did they take their defeat in a sportsmanlike manner. An *Oakland Tribune* reporter bemoaned how the Berkeley fans

...invaded the field where the wearers of the

Cardinal were romping in wild glee and showed a disposition to wrangle and brawl.

Sad as the scenes in the Berkeley stands must have been, the saddest sights San Francisco offered that afternoon took place far from the gridiron. Nearby Railroad Hospital resembled "a field hospital during the height of a bloody battle" according to observers as a steady stream of victims overwhelmed its wards. As word of the disaster spread, crowds of anxious relatives deserted their Thanksgiving feasts to lay siege to the hospitals and morgues. The flood of bodies quickly overwhelmed the city morgue. The coroner had to press the city's new morgue into service a few weeks ahead of schedule to accommodate the overflow. Throughout the afternoon and evening, these buildings echoed with exclamations like "My god, it is Willie! He promised me that he would not go to the game" or "It is Leon. Oh, my boy, speak to me!" Newspapers, who in the best journalistic traditions described the collapse as "the most horrifying accident that ever happened in San Francisco" chipped in with cheery headlines like "Hospital Crowded with the Maimed!" and "Death Reaps a Dread Harvest of Lives!"

Numerous were the tales of tragedy, irony, and narrow escapes. One dead lad had earlier photographed and sketched for a technical drawing class the very building where he met his fate. Another victim was the runaway son of a former mayor of Topeka, Kansas. He was apparently due to be shipped back home the next day. A third was William Valencia, grandson of one of the city's mayors during the city's Spanish colonial days. He died only three blocks from the street that still bears his grandfather's name. One man described how he'd brought his young brother-in-law down from the roof moments before the collapse; another told how the merry rooftop crew had joked "If this thing breaks, we'll all go down together." But the heaviest burden of guilt was born by little 11-year old Jimmie Carroll, the mascot of the Stanford side. As little Jimmie cavorted along the sidelines in front of the Stanford rooting section, his 17-

SCIENCE CORNER

Why Didn't They Sizzle Like Sausages?

As if the story of a small horde of football fans suddenly finding themselves on top of a red-hot glass furnace isn't bizarre enough, an even stranger fact emerges from the newspaper accounts.

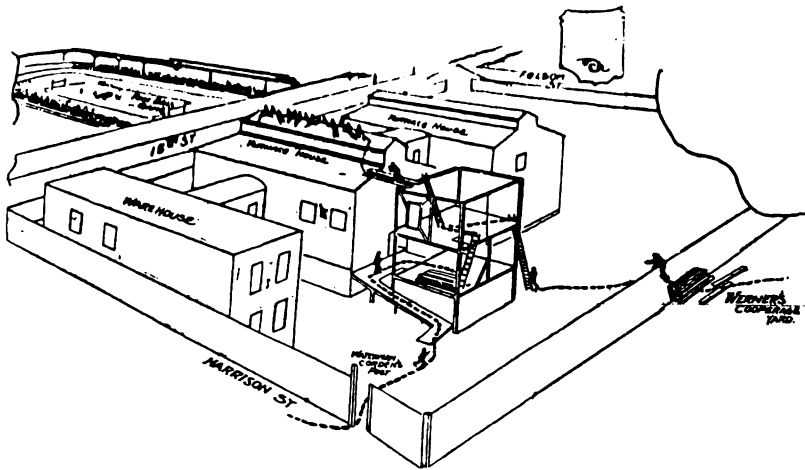
Most of them weren't severely burned.

With only a few exceptions, the reported causes of death are fall-related: fractured skulls, snapped spines, ruptured spleens, and so on. Even among the injured, the litany of wounds is surprisingly mundane: broken arms, dislocated shoulders, and the inevitable "internal injuries." Only a handful of what must have been dozens of fans who landed on the furnace were scorched enough to be noted by the sensation-crazed newspapers.

It's a matter of elementary heat conduction. The good folks who built the glass plant didn't put the brick cover on the furnace to keep football fans out. It was there to keep the heat in, bricks being comparatively poor conductors of heat. Hot as the bricks may have been, the actual heat flow from the bricks into the fans was relatively slow. They were being slowly roasted, not quickly fried, much like the turkeys awaiting them at home. Between their heavy clothing and the nimble actions of the workers, most escaped with no worse than superficial burns. It was much like fire-walking across a bed of coals; a brisk pace works fine, a contemplative stroll doesn't. Landing on top of a glass furnace may not be as bad as it sounds. But you know it's still gotta hurt.

year old brother Peter was forced to watch from the glass factory roof from which he would plunge to his death. You'd think little Jimmie could have at least scored him a comp ticket.

In all, 22 people were killed, and at least 80 injured in what remains today the worst accident ever to befall spectators at an



There's more than one way of getting into a glass factory.

American sporting event. Although there was at least one father/son combination up there, the overwhelming majority of victims were young-mischief-minded boys and teens--one of the injured lads had been indicted for manslaughter in connection with the death of a playmate. Conspicuous by their absence from the victims list were Berkeley and Stanford students. Could it be that University men were intelligent enough to avoid such a rickety perch? Or was it due to the cut-rate rooter tickets?

In the days following the tragedy, San Francisco was awash with rumors that not only had the management of the glass works made no effort to keep the fans off the roof, an enterprising watchman had charged admission. It came out that several people had been given permits by management to enter the factory to watch the game. Several youngsters told the papers how they'd had to shell out pocket change to get into the grounds, and at least one mother complained about giving her son a quarter to pay his way into the factory. For their part, the police roundly denied ever being summoned to clear the roof. The mood was black as the

public looked for someone to blame, preferably affiliated with the glass works.

However, the coroner's inquest vindicated plant management, and even made one feel sorry for the watchmen. The jury concluded the factory's skeleton crew was no match for hordes of fans out to see the game at all costs. Apparently, the fans in their zeal climbed over and tunneled under fences, and even scaled an adjacent under-construction building and improvised bridges over an alley to reach the glass factory proper. Chances are, even if that mythical enterprising watchman had been charging admission, most of the roof-top gang would still have managed to sneak in one way or another. The kids who did cough up quarters to get in undoubtedly had been taken in by some local rakehells who saw an opportunity to make a few bucks off dumb little kids. (Ah, exploitation of the young--some things never change.)

One allegation was true: the company had issued a handful of permits to relatives of management and other well-connected folks. But these invited guests had watched the game from windows on the upper floors

continued...

KILLED 13 DEATH REAPS A DREA LIVES AND PLUNG

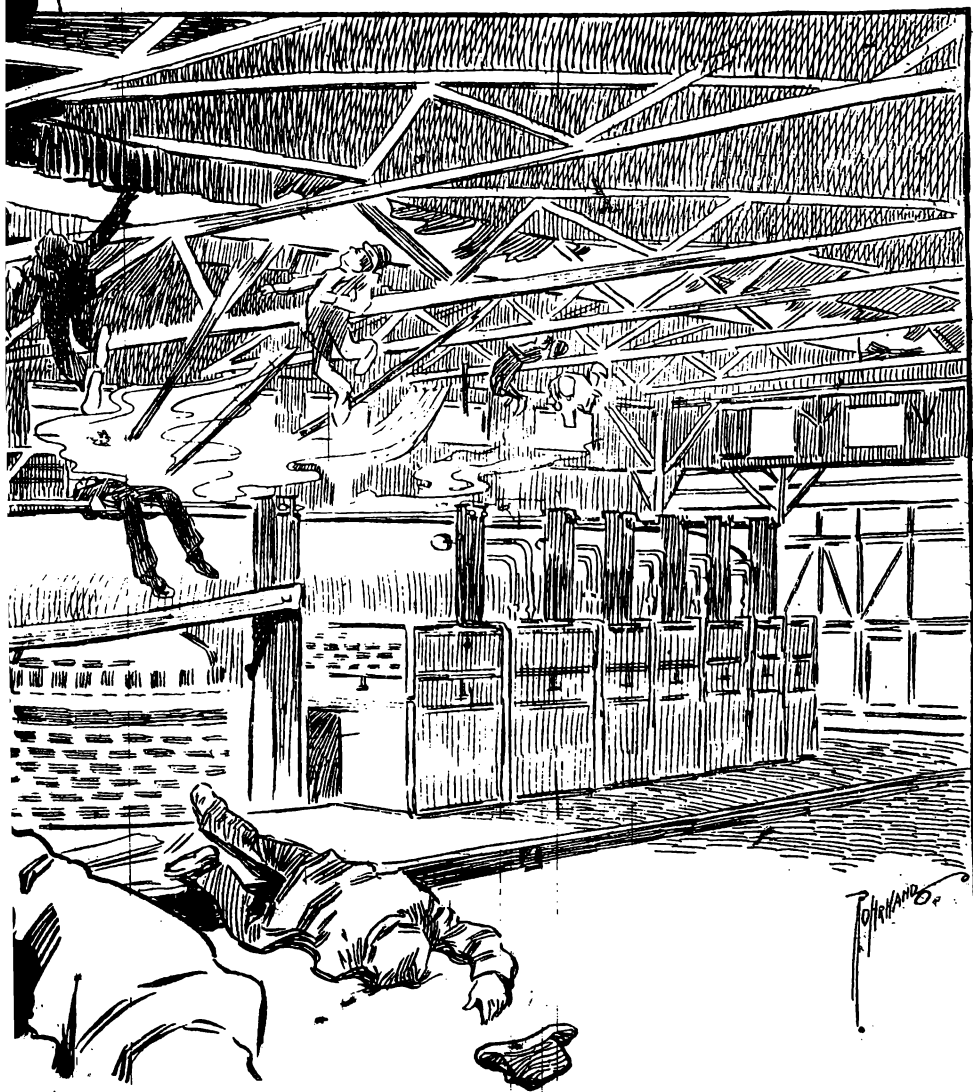
Three Hundred Men and Boys Are H
the San Francisco and Pacific Gla



SCENE IN THE FACTORY WHEN THE ROOF (1)

THE HARVEST OF THIS CITY INTO GLOOM 78 INJURED

Whirled Headlong Through the Roof of
Steel Works Down Upon a Furnace.



SAVED WAY WITH ITS BURDEN OF HUMANITY.

of the factory. They played no part in the accident. And the records showed the company had called the police; the police just didn't show up until it was too late to do anything other than scrape people off the factory floor. Although the police were chided for this, the jury ultimately placed the blame on the victims, echoing San Francisco Mayor Phelan's comments right after the tragedy:

The crushing out of the lives of so many young boys and men on this festive day casts a gloom of sorrow over the community. Eager to see the sport the boys were naturally heedless of danger. There seems to be no blame, however, to attach to anyone.

One newspaper wrote that the winning field goal "...will be talked about as long as the walls of Stanford stand." Perhaps it is,

but certainly not with any great frequency anymore. Conversations on Stanford's Quad these days are more likely to be about Chelsea than Traeger's immortal kick. Even at Cal, where football freeloading is a noble tradition--economy minded fans to this day catch home games *gratis* from the slopes or (if they're daring enough) the trees of "Tightwad Hill" overlooking the stadium, one never hears of the Glass Factory Disaster. The 1900 Big Game does live on in the various histories of California and Stanford football. Yet somehow these books make no mention about the historic event happening just across the street. The Great Glass Factory Disaster has been utterly and completely forgotten.



Into the Crowd

Motorcycle Racing: The featured event of the September 8, 1912 card at the Newark, New Jersey's New Valisburg Motordrome was a four-mile race. Although six motorcycles were entered, everyone knew it was a two bike race between Ray Seymour, the current world-record holder, and the young hotshot from out west, Eddie Hasha. So completely did they outclass the rest of the field, the other four entrants were granted a one lap (¼ mile) handicap.

The race began with Hasha in the lead. In the middle of the second lap, Seymour made a move. As the bikes sped around the steeply banked, saucer-like open-air track at over 90 mph, he accelerated past Hasha. The 5000 spectators roared in excitement. And Hasha lost control.

His bike hurtled up the curve, crossing the painted "danger line" that ringed the top of the track at full speed. It easily tore through the safety netting keeping the spectators out. The bike was among the crowd so quickly a boy sitting trackside had his head torn off before he could even react. Pandemonium broke out; a newspaper said: "The whirling of the motorcycle, swift as a skyrocket, through the bleachers packed with men and boys brought instant panic." Spectators stampeded to escape the out-of-control machine. Incredibly, Hasha managed to stay on until the bike got tangled with a roof column. As it whirled round and round the support, he was flung off. He would die of multiple injuries.

But this accident wasn't over yet! Sans rider, the bike somehow freed itself from the post and careened back onto the track. As it tumbled down the embankment towards the infield, last-place rider John Albright crashed into it and was killed. Between the bike and the stampede, eight people (including the two riders) died, and 20 more injured. Although an inquest was unable to pin criminal responsibility on anyone, the motordrome was closed down as unsafe. Its owner later converted it to a much more sensible use: a velodrome. At least bicycles don't go 90 mph.

Quotable Quotes

From the Wonderful World of Sports

I shot him because I liked him a great deal and I knew I couldn't have him. And if I couldn't have him, neither could anyone else.

--Ruth Steinhausen explaining why she shot Chicago Cub Eddie Waitkus (whom she'd never met) in 1949. Waitkus recovered to be the 1950 "Comeback Player of the Year" and inspire Bernard Malamud's novel The Natural.

The only way to shift the crowd from the corners was to blip the accelerator and slide the tail over wide, which normally did the trick. It made an additional hazard if spectators clustered at a bend as you couldn't tell until the last possible moment if it was a right or left hander. But in some ways, they helped, because if you approached a corner at speed and it was deserted, it was a sure sign that it was safe to take flat out. The crowds only congregated, like vultures, where there was a chance of bloodshed.

--race car driver Peter Miller on tactics for the Mille Miglia, an Italian road race since discontinued for obvious reasons.

If a sane man stopped to think about American football, he would never set foot on the field.

--Nicholas Mason

If rugby was a hooligan's game played by gentlemen and soccer a gentlemen's game played by hooligans, then Australian Rules could only be described as a hooligan's game played by hooligans.

--Don Atyeo on Australian Rules football

If the players were armed with guns, there wouldn't be stadiums large enough to hold the crowds.

--Irwin Shaw on the NFL

When you get up in the morning, do you need a cup of coffee to get started? Well, after cycling 150 miles the day before, we might need three or four coffees.

--Tommy Simpson, British cyclist who collapsed and died during the 1967 Tour de France. Numerous amphetamine capsules were found in his jersey pockets and luggage.

I'm not about to go out there one on one against a guy who's grunting and drooling and coming at me with dilated pupils unless I'm in the same condition.

--NFL player on performance-enhancing drugs

Throughout the years, I've developed my own philosophy about high school basketball. Winning isn't all that matters. I don't care how many games you win, it's how many championships you win that counts.

--anonymous high school coach

Sportsmanship and easygoing methods are all right, but it is the prospect of a hot fight that brings out the crowds

--baseball player/manager John McGraw c. 1890

THE CLASS OF '31

It Was a Very, Very Good Year

It began inauspiciously enough in the waning days of summer of the Depression year of 1931. Throughout the land, boys, lads, and young men from all walks of life heeded the call. Cast aside were the frivolous pursuits of youth: the fishing rods, the rolling hoops, the bathing trunks. With a collective impulse seldom observed outside the natural habitat of the lemming, they descended on the one true arena of manhood: the local gridiron. As the humid dog days of summer slowly gave way to the hazy crisp afternoons of fall, the air of the land came alive with the sounds of football.

The sharply-cried signals of quarterbacks, the crisp thuds of punts and place kicks, the leather-on-leather thunk of colliding bodies, and the critical shouts of coaches echoed through every town, village, and hamlet. Steadily the rag-tag gangs of boys and young men coalesced into smooth, well organized teams, executing enigmatic maneuvers like the "flanker reverse" and "end around" with razor-sharp precision.

Slowly, another sound swelled, drowning out all others: the roar of the crowds packing the stands to cheer on their local eleven.

Yet, as the season slowly progressed, an occasional discordant note sounded in this triumphant symphony of American masculinity. That sharp crack--is it just another broken arm or cracked rib? Or could it be the season-ending sound of a snapping spine? The weeks passed. More and more odd sounds began to be heard. Adding to the steadily growing cacophony were muffled cracks of fractured skulls, the subtle thunks of ruptured spleens, and the silent roar of all too youthful heart attacks. From North Dakota to New York, from California to Connecticut, what began as an almost unnoticed trickle grew into a virtual torrent

of mangled, shattered, and occasionally dead football players being hauled from the field. When that great scorekeeper in the sky did his season-ending tally, he probably dropped his chalk at the size of his recruiting class.

It was a great year--the greatest in football history.

That deadly season of 1931 began like any other with the aptly named Hell Week. One of football's greatest, yet seldom acknowledged, traditions is the carnage of pre-season practice. Unlike other sports, football practice is much more than physical conditioning and dress rehearsal. Football

coaches apparently relish driving their charges to the brink of death even though no one's keeping score. Taking their cues from the cadence keepers on Roman galleys ("Ramming... Speed!!!"), they stalk the sidelines like slave-drivers in sweats, exhorting and verbally flogging their charges with words that sting more than any whip. The results would be a credit to any chain gang boss. Aspiring players

willingly run incredible distances in punishing heat while wearing heavy equipment.¹ The various "drills" are but euphemisms for aspiring players repeatedly smashing into one another until one drops. And just when the players can take no more--it's time for wind sprints! With the oh-so-prized first string positions reserved for players who display the most suicidal abandon and have the most pronounced homicidal tendencies, fatalities are inevitable. Only the most thick-skulled



¹ Until startlingly recent times, many coaches subscribed to a screwball theory that players should drink little or no water during practice, even in August with 100° heat, 90% humidity, and full pads. Heat stroke city!

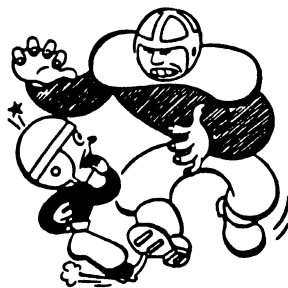
survive.

Coaches have learned to take frequent deaths on the practice field philosophically. The player who obligingly drops dead does the coaching staff a favor, after all. Not only is it easier to bury a player than to cut him, a timely death can save the coaches hours of making that razor-thin distinction between a 4th-string player and a non-player. And if a player's skull is so brittle that it cracks like an eggshell the first time it's kicked by a linebacker, better it be on the practice field. Getting killed during a game can lead to far more serious repercussions--perhaps even a touchdown by the opposition.

Thus, when the first stories began trickling in from practice fields in the provinces that September, no one sounded an alarm. The initial fatality list was dominated by football's traditional cannon fodder: inexperienced, undersized, acne ridden teenagers trying just a little too hard to make the high school team. A dozen or so high school fatalities were then the season norm. (Even today, a few high school players usually get killed every year.) College players are a hardier lot.² More than a death or two in a year was unusual. But this was 1931. Before the first snap of the season, two college players were dead.

Leon Carey, a freshman defensive back for the obscure institution of Moniticello A & M, had the singular honors of inaugurating the year's collegiate carnage. During practice on September 17, while flattening a ball-carrier during drill, he took a knee to the head. Smack! The blow didn't even faze him. He finished practice and even ate dinner that evening. But later that night, he collapsed with a cerebral hemorrhage. He died a few days later.

The second college player went down even before Carey finished dying. While practicing on September 19, someone cut down Wayne Merrifield of Michigan State Normal with a nifty, nasty block to the knees



on a punt. Crack! And this block was very nasty. Merrifield's knee was hopelessly shattered. That alone was enough to free up one position in the starting line-up. However, Merrifield was out for more than the season. Early the next morning, his knee injury triggered a "coronary fat embolism" that killed him in his hospital bed. Nice blocking, no? And this is just practice for the real thing!

The pre-season winnowing over, players began to lay down their lives for their beloved alma mater in earnest. The laurels for the first player killed in an actual game were apparently won by a high school player: William Maher, a fullback for the Oakland (California) High Wildcats. During a September 25 match-up with cross-town rivals Fremont High, the highly-regarded running back more than lived up to his star billing. He smashed through the beleaguered Tiger line repeatedly, leaving a stream of gangly adolescent guards and acne-scarred tackles sprawled in his wake. Even from the distance of 66 years, it's not too hard to understand the secret of his success. He was 20 years old, running wild over a field full of teenagers.³ Can you say "eligibility"?

At the end of the first quarter, Maher scored a touchdown on a line plunge. Crunch! For an encore, he smashed through the tackles again for the conversion. Pow! The coach decided things were sufficiently well-in-hand to let his chief asset take a rest

² Pros are the toughest. The NFL loses less than a player a decade, with a perfect record since Chuck Hughes's death (see the October 24th entry in the 1997 MCBF Datebook for details) in 1971.

³ And no, I haven't the faintest idea what a 20-year old was doing playing high school football either.

and give other, more expendable players a chance. Maher hadn't given the least sign of distress or mentioned any discomfort to his teammates. But as he trotted towards the sideline, the coach saw his worst nightmare come true--the death of a star player. The stunned gridiron general later told the papers, "He was walking toward the bench when he suddenly collapsed." Thump! Maher was later pronounced dead of a cerebral hemorrhage. Apparently some of his under-sized adolescent opposition had sneaked in a few good licks of their own. At least Oakland managed to hang on and escape with a 27-0 victory.

Maher's rapid demise barely edged out another high school boy, Cason Nabors. The same day Maher died, Nabors was knocking the opposition around two thousand miles away in Alabama. Unfortunately, one sloppily executed block wound up with an upended blockee landing right on Nabors' stomach. Ooof! Nabors died two days later of a ruptured intestine.

The next day, on September 26, the intercollegiate season received its baptism. In their season opener against Valparaiso University, Elmhurst College captain Rueben Gretschow led half of the Pirate defense in gang tackling an opposing end. Smack! Down went the players in a welter of colored jerseys and leather helmets. But when officials finally untangled the pile-up, Gretschow remained motionless on the field. He was paralyzed, but not dead, from a fractured 4th vertebrae.

Americans pride themselves on their never-say-die attitude. And none so much as athletes, who make a fetish of "playing through pain." It takes more than a broken neck to keep these plucky fellows down. Gretschow was more than up to the part. Perhaps he could no longer suit up, leave his hospital bed, or even attend to his most basic bodily functions. But he wasn't about to let these mere details interfere with his sacred duty as team captain. From his hospital bed in full traction, Rueben continued to inspire and motivate his teammates to even greater heights of gridiron derring-do. Via the newspapers, he

urged them to

Go in and give 'em everything you've got next Saturday. I can't be there, but I'll be there in spirit.

As for his injury--why pshaw, it was nothing. He told the reporters defiantly, "Don't think a little thing like a broken neck is going to get the best of me." Oddly enough, this was not entirely idle chatter by a jock befuddled by big words like "negative prognosis." Rueben knew spinal fractures. He had broken his neck in a construction accident four years earlier and recovered. Why, he'd be out there next year, busting heads like nothing had happened!

Orthodox medical opinion was justifiably more pessimistic. The plucky captain's condition steadily deteriorated. By the following Saturday, his condition was so grave doctors kept the news of his teammates' stirring victory over Milwaukee State Teacher's College from him. They feared that:

telling him something that would make his heart race like news of a victory by his college football team might be fatal.

Even this precaution was for naught. Rueben died the next day, innocent of both his teammate's stirring triumph and his no-doubt Gipper-like role in it. Picture some leather lunged coach exhorting his squad to go out there and "Win one for Rueben."

Comparative calm reigned on the nation's gridirons for the next few weeks, with nary a sandlot player killed. But on October 24th, gridiron carnage made the front page, triggering a national debate and burning an indelible image in the nation's consciousness. The 1931 football season would forever after be remembered as The Season That Killed.

The scene: the Yale Bowl, then one of the game's premier venues. 75,000 frenzied spectators jammed the stands to witness the underdog Elis clash with mighty Army. This meeting of the Bulldog and the Mule was one of the season's most heavily anticipated match-ups. It would also prove the most historic, albeit for an entirely different reason.



Early in the fourth quarter, the stands were a madhouse. After three scoreless periods, Army had finally pushed the ball across the goal line. But the gloom that enveloped the Yale rooters quickly turned to pandemonium. Bud Parker of Yale had taken the ensuing kick-off at his own 12 yard line and, twisting and turning, returned the ball 88 yards for a touchdown. Throughout the Yale rooting sections, out came countless hip flasks for celebratory toasts of bath-tub gin (students) and bonded Canadian whiskey (alumni). Boola, boola, boola!

Army elected to kick.⁴ Yale back Bob Lassiter took the ball deep in his own territory. Tucking it firmly under his arm, he took off upfield, his arm outstretched and knees swinging high, visions of Parker's glorious run no doubt dancing before his eyes. And hurtling downfield towards a rendezvous with destiny was Army's tough little second-string right end, Richard Sheridan. How tough was Sheridan? Instead of getting into West Point via Congressional appointment, the 26-year old aspiring officer had done it the hard way. After a few years in junior college, he joined the Army as an enlisted man. He then scored an Academy appointment by acing a competitive service-wide exam. Basic training and a plebe year, Jesus Christ. That poor little Ivy League boy didn't stand a chance.

Sheridan hurtled down the field at full speed. Just short of the 20-yard-line, he

cleverly eluded a Yale blocker, lowered his shoulder, and went for the kill. He drove into Lassiter with all his might. But as he hit, Lassiter's knee swung up and smashed into Sheridan's head. Keerang! The blow jerked his neck back at a cruel and unnatural angle and snapped his spine like a matchstick. They went down; Lassiter clinging desperately to the ball, Sheridan rapidly sinking into a deep coma from his severed spinal cord. An official who witnessed the play told the newspapers:

... it was head on, terrific, and terrifying. There was a sharp crack. He crumpled. There was no rebound, no roll.

A sudden hush came over the crowd. An Army coach described it as "a shocking and fearful quiet."

This silence prevailed for the 10 or 15 minutes it took to haul Sheridan off. Then (what else?) they finished the game. The Army coaches agreed with Yale officials that one little broken neck shouldn't interfere with a perfectly good game of football. And somewhere deep in Army's bench, a little third stringer thrilled at the prospect of playing in the famed Yale Bowl.

Sheridan never regained consciousness. He died two days later amidst nationwide front-page publicity. There was some talk of Army canceling the balance of their schedule--after team captain Eugene Byrne was killed in the 1909 Harvard game, they'd done just that. But opposition to the gesture was extremely vocal: students, alumni, sportswriters, even Sheridan's mother! Army finished their season with a fresh face at right end.

Army coach Earl Blaik blamed Sheridan's mishap on physiology. Years later, he wrote:

There is no doubt that a contributing factor in the fatal injury to Sheridan was Dick's exceptionally long neck. Thereafter, I would never play a man with that kind of neck conformation.

Presumably, Army squads became noted for their uniformly squat necks.

Two weeks later, Millsaps College tackle C.D. Smith was fatally injured in a

⁴ The scored-upon team has the option; back in those days of leather helmets, quick kicks, and scoreless ties, it was common to kick instead of receive.

game vs. the Stetson University Hatters. Details are scanty, but apparently he missed a block, only to wind up with another player's knees coming down hard on his back. Snap! A few days later, James Nichols, a center for the University of Alabama's freshman team, broke his back (this time between the 5th & 6th vertebrae) while trying to break up a play in a scrimmage. Crack! He managed to hang on for a week before dying; unfortunately, data on the neck conformation of these two players has been lost to history.

Any lingering doubts about the college game were dispelled less than two weeks later. Several schools have a 12th man⁵ tradition; well, on November 21, 1931, Fordham could well have used a 13th man to handle the other end of the stretcher. Within the space of a few minutes at the start of the third quarter in a game against Bucknell at the Polo Grounds in Manhattan, no less than three Fordham players were carried off, victims of a veritable on-field concussion epidemic. The first to go was star tackle Cornelius Murphy. One account had him going into the turf headfirst while trying to block on a kick-off return; another claimed he'd been hit in the head while trying to block a punt. Wham! Whatever the cause, his leather helmet couldn't prevent a serious concussion. Scarcely had he been hauled off the field when guard Paul Howell, who played on the line next to Murphy, got his bell rang and was carried from the field. Bang! And hold onto your tickets! The best was yet to come.

John Szymanski came in for Murphy. But he bore up under the furious Bucknell rally for only a few moments. After one particularly rough play, he remained on the ground. The trainer trotted out, and after application of the "magic sponge,"

Szymanski arose, seemingly none the worse for wear. But before he reached the sidelines, he collapsed again. Thump! He was partially paralyzed and unconscious, far beyond rejuvenation by any sponge. Team captain James Murphy capped the action later in the fourth quarter. With only minutes left in the game, he had to be carried off after winding up at the bottom of one too many pileups and collapsing from exhaustion. Whump!

By football standards, James Murphy and Howell weren't injured seriously; Murphy was never hospitalized and Howell was back on campus the following day. Con Murphy and Szymanski's injuries, however, were far more serious. The New York newspapers printed daily reports on the health of the two fallen gridgers in the weeks following the game. The prognosis for both seemed hopeful at first. Szymanski, who apparently suffered the most serious injuries, regained consciousness the next day. His paralysis was gradually decreasing. Murphy was improving even faster; he was well enough three days later to be moved to the university infirmary. Cheerful reports indicated he could sit up, even walk! But he took a sudden turn for the worse and died on December 2 of a cerebral hemorrhage. Szymanski, after several ups and downs, recovered sufficiently to go home in March, but his football career was finished. Murphy, however, would go on to be elected 1932 team captain posthumously.

Not too surprisingly, this spate of deaths, especially the collegiate ones,⁶ sparked a lively debate in newspapers and magazines. Most memorable were the wits at the *Columbia Spectator* who forever put the kibosh on careers in sports writing with

⁵ The crowd's the "12th man"; usually it celebrates some long-ago day where the home side, short a man, hastily dragged some schmoe from the stands and stuck him in the game. The crowd demonstrates their willingness to uphold this tradition by spending the entire game standing up and screaming.

⁶ Due to the confused nature of the death list, it is unclear exactly how many college players were killed in 1931. I've described the seven big ones in this article. However, some contemporary sources also refer to an eighth victim, one Fred Murphy of Cortland (NY) Normal who suffered a ruptured kidney the day of the Army/Yale game. Completely overshadowed by Richard Sheridan, he died on November 3.

an editorial that observed:

If men wish to commit suicide, we suppose it's their business. But when a crowd of football coaches and other phenomena of the sport arrange things so nicely for the mobs in the stands, that the players become human sacrifices, then the word 'murder' creeps into the picture.



player killed by a kick to the head in a game against NYU) marked a high point for pure brutality. Things were so bad that President Theodore Roosevelt, a great fan of hunting, war and other violent outdoor sports, was appalled. He *personally* intervened three times during the season, summoning collegiate officials to the

All across the country, high schools and some colleges seriously considered dropping the sport. Many did. For the school board of St. Edward High School in Nebraska, however, it wasn't a hard decision. They'd had, not one, but two varsity players killed.

Football was not without its defenders. Fielding Yost⁷ prepared a report claiming that "only" 21 of the as high as 50 reported deaths were directly attributable to football, and many of these could have been avoided by better coaching and more practice. (A presumably more robust study a few months later placed the number at 49 dead⁸ and 1,346 injured). Somehow, Yost found comfort in the fact that "only" two players at major colleges were killed; perhaps because coaches at smaller schools were more likely to be spared the agony of a wasted scholarship. Be it 21, 49, or 50 dead, Damon Runyon summed it up best: "...that's a fair death-rate for a diversion."

Rampant death on the American gridiron was nothing new. College football had already weathered several fatality flaps. Back in 1894, the dead and injured had piled up at such an alarming rate that the beloved flying wedge and other colorful mass-momentum plays had to be banned (amidst much teeth gnashing and complaints about "mollycoddling" the game). The 1905 season (23 dead, including a Union College

White House and threatening to do something about the carnage himself if they didn't. The colleges responded by forming the NCAA. 1909 was another banner year, with Army, Navy, and the University of Virginia all losing players permanently. Officials responded by legalizing the forward pass to cut down on line smashes. Helmets, however, remained optional. They didn't become mandatory until 1943!

Thus, a few dead players was nothing new. The NCAA was more than up to the challenge. A set of widely ballyhooed, but mainly minor and/or irrelevant rule changes were introduced for the 1932 season. And they worked! Fatalities didn't drop much: 37 more players died. Given the number of schools dropping football, the death *rate* may have actually increased! The improvement was in who had been killed. Thirty-three were the usual sandlot, high school, and semi-pro rabble beneath the notice of all but the smallest local newspapers. And the college players--why, they weren't much better. One died in an intramural game in California, two others were killed while practicing for small, obscure schools in Delaware and Louisiana. Only one college player, Ralph McClure of Colorado College, was killed during a regularly-scheduled game. And in the east-coast centered sports establishment of the 1930s, a fatality in Colorado was the moral equivalent of no deaths at all. The game had been saved so it could kill again.

⁷ The same Fielding Yost who coached Stanford the day the glass factory collapsed!

⁸ The balance of the list was made up of high school students, adult amateurs and semi-pros, and a sprinkling of child sandlot players. No professional players were killed in 1931.



ON ICE

The First NHL Fatality

Hockey is a rough game. The players hurtle around an ice rink at speeds up to 30 mph, smashing into each other as they scramble after a rock-hard rubber puck. When they fall down, they slide smoothly and swiftly across the ice until their progress is firmly and painfully halted by the rigid “boards” surrounding the rink. Periodically, a player winds up and unloads a 120 mph slapshot, generally aimed in the vicinity of the goalie’s head. Action often comes to a halt to allow the more pugnacious players to try their hands at some bare-knuckle boxing, or, when they’re *really* angry, a little stick-blade surgery. Through long practice, players become adept at stickhandling skills that have nothing to do with the puck. It’s a spear! No, it’s a club! Why, it’s three weapons in one!

With all these varied modes of mayhem, you’d think pro hockey players would get killed all the time, sorta like boxers and race car drivers. Astonishingly, they don’t. It’s as if that special Providence that looks out for drunks, children, and fools also has a soft spot for the cream of Canada’s national sport. The National Hockey League has had no shortage of close calls over the years. Dozens of players, including some of the game’s greatest stars, have been bonked, beaned, beaten, and bashed to the brink of death.* Yet somehow, they always came back, perhaps not to play but at least to collect their pension. This is despite the fact that helmets for players and masks for goalies** were rare until the ‘60s,

and didn’t become mandatory until the ‘70s and ‘80s. Despite this, the NHL managed to get through almost 51½ seasons before they finally lost one.

Bill Masterton was an unlikely candidate to be Victim #1. He belonged to that rarest sub-species of the athletic world: the jock who got out when the getting was good. A native of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Masterton went from the legendary rough ‘n’ ready Canadian youth hockey system to intercollegiate stardom at the University of Denver. He was a two-time All-American



center, capping his intercollegiate career in 1961 by winning tournament MVP honors as he led the Pioneers to the NCAA Division I championship. This piqued the interest of the Montreal Canadiens, the NHL’s most storied franchise. The fall after graduating, as his fellow classmates headed off to grad school or settled into careers as white-collar drones, Masterton packed up his diploma, skates, and protective cup and reported to the Hull, Ontario franchise of the Eastern

* The first NHL All-Star game in 1933 was a benefit for Toronto star Ace Bailey, who’d suffered a near fatal skull fracture courtesy of the stick of Boston’s Eddie Shore.

** It wasn’t until 1959, over a coach’s strenuous objections, that Montreal Canadiens goalie Jacques Plante became the first to wear a mask in

a game. Damn good idea, too. 11 years later, as your editor watched on TV, Plante was knocked silly by slap shot to the forehead that would have probably killed one of the several goalies still playing bare-faced. I still remember the headlines: “Plante Saved by Own Invention.”

Professional Hockey League.

His career in the minors started auspiciously. After a successful rookie campaign, he was promoted to the Cleveland Barons of the American Hockey League for the 1962/63 season. He had another good year, finishing 6th in the league in scoring and leading the Barons to the playoffs. But the Montreal brain trust remained unimpressed. No offers to play with the big boys at the Forum were forthcoming.

Here Masterton violated the jock credo. In a profession whose members are noted for keeping faith in their chances to make it to the top long after all hope is gone, Masterton made a rational decision. He took a serious and realistic look at his chances of a serious pro career and concluded they were negligible. He considered his options: bumping around the minors and dragging his dentures from Medicine Hat and Moose Jaw until he became a bitter, gimpy-kneed 30-year old cut from the roster to make room for a dewy-eyed, toothy teenager, or quitting and getting a real job. It's not a hard choice, just an unlikely one.

Masterton retired from hockey and went back to Denver to get his MBA. After he graduated, he got a job administering contracts for Honeywell in Minneapolis. But, despite his gray-flannel exterior and the new wife and kids, he remained a hockey player at heart. He kept in shape by playing with the US National team on evenings and weekends.

Masterton's tranquil little world was shattered in 1967. Little realizing they were signing one man's death warrant, the NHL owners initiated the most ambitious expansion of a big-time pro sports league in history. A single stroke of the pen doubled the size of the circuit from six teams to twelve. The result? Overnight, the market for callow, unproven youths and toothless over-the-hill veterans exploded. Hapless and desperate owners of new franchises rushed about frantically trying to fill their rosters. They were ready to sign hockey players, any players, no matter what rock they crawled out from under, as long as they could swing

a stick, or at least their fists.

Masterton had spent too many thousands of hours on the ice to let this second opportunity go by. When the brand new Minnesota North Stars hit the ice for their inaugural season of 1967/68, leading the variously aged, adolescent, and infirm squad was Masterton, the 29 year-old rookie first string center.

He didn't set the league on fire. But from the first, Masterton was in there, proving his worth to those snobby Canadian executives who'd failed to see his potential in '63. He scored the first North Stars goal. In the first 37 games of his big-league career, he added three more and chipped in eight assists--hardly all-star numbers, but not bad for a man who'd been away from pro competition for four years.

But it all ended in the 38th game of the season. That night, the North Stars were playing the Oakland Seals, a fellow expansion team, at home. Early in the first period, there was some sort of melee near the Oakland blue line. With the sport comprising of little more than a succession of confused melees, it's not surprising that accounts of exactly what happened are confused and conflicting. Masterton was spearheading a charge into the Oakland end. After making his pass, he had a violent encounter with a pair of Oakland defensemen near the blue line. The contact ended with Masterton sprawled out on the ice, unconscious and with blood streaming from his head. Needless to say, he hadn't been wearing a helmet. Some witnesses claim the check (the polite hockey term for the actively encouraged and legal practice of smashing into opposing players) that sent Masterton to the ice was hard but clean. Others muttered about high sticking, although no penalty was called on the play. Dirty or clean, the Seals had really socked it to Masterton. He had flipped over backwards onto the ice. His coach claimed

Masterton hit the ice so hard that I'm sure he was unconscious before he fell. I've never seen anybody go down that way. We heard him crash to the ice from the bench.

More believable accounts suggest that

hitting the ice knocked Masterton out. Whatever the cause, the accident seemed unremarkable at the time. Hockey players may not get knocked out as often as private detectives, but it's far from unusual. As Masterton's limp, bleeding form was carried from the ice (some say he was heard to mutter "Never again"), it seemed like just another night in the NHL. The game continued after the brief stoppage, ultimately ending in a 2-2 tie.

At the hospital, doctors quickly realized that the Seals had done more than ring Masterton's bell. His skull was fractured and his brain so severely injured that surgery was hopeless. It was all they could do to keep him alive and comatose on a respirator. He managed to hang on for another 30 hours before dying early on the morning of January 15, 1968.

His death on the eve of the NHL's annual All-Star game triggered a perfunctory debate about the league's lax safety measures. At the time, helmets were optional, and only worn by 3% of the players (ironically one was Masterton's back-up). A former Chicago Black Hawks coach (perhaps the recipient of too many sticks to the head himself) argued against this mollycoddling.

A guy wearing a helmet invites attention. Players are apt to give him a few extra raps on the skull, figuring they won't hurt him.

There was some debate about the comfort factor, and even a threat of helmet legislation in at least one state. But the one honest voice was Chicago star Bobby Hull: "The reason we don't wear helmets is vanity." Helmets remained optional for another decade before being required for all players signed after 1979.

The debate died down quickly. They established the Bill Masterton Trophy, awarded each year by the NHL Writer's Association to the player that best exemplifies the "unsung hero" qualities Masterton supposedly embodied. But, with the NHL awarding seemingly dozens of different trophies each year, each named after some obscure person, this did little

THE FIRST PROFESSIONAL FATALITY

Masterton was the first NHL player killed in the line of duty. But he isn't alone in biting it in the North American pay for play rinks. He had at least one predecessor in the wild & woolly pre-NHL days: Owen "Bud" McCort.

McCort was playing for Cornwall (Ontario) in the Federal Amateur Hockey League (evidently only amateur in name). In a home game vs. Ottawa in 1907, he had a little tiff with Ottawa's Art Throop. During the ensuing brawl, Throop retaliated by bashing him over the head a few times with his stick, and triumphantly so. McCort had to leave the game with a severe head cut. And quite a severe cut it was. He lost consciousness later that night, and died the next morning.

Throop was arrested and indicted for murder. The charge was later reduced to manslaughter. But even this didn't stick. Apparently full-scale rink riots weren't invented by the Philadelphia Flyers "Broad Street Bullies" teams of the 1970s. Witnesses testified that a few other players had cracked McCort over the head during the fight, too. The judge, despairing of determining who had actually struck the fatal blow, acquitted Throop. It's unclear whether this incident gave Throop an epiphany, or if league officials knew who really swung the fatal stick. Throop never played organized hockey again.

more than institutionalize Masterton's obscurity. He remains little more than a footnote player, and a damned minor one at that, in NHL history.

But in some ways, he had the last laugh. One of the NHL's greatest legends is the "Curse of Muldoon" that supposedly kept the Chicago Black Hawks from finishing in first place for their first forty years. Muldoon's curse was, however, far less

cruel than the "Curse of Masterton" that seemed to attach itself to the Seals franchise. Other teams refused to be awed by the mystique of the only NHL team to kill an opponent. A game with the Seals became the next best thing to a night off for the other side. Picked to win their division in their inaugural season, the Seals finished dead last. It was the only talent they would ever display. In the franchise's short, miserable 11-year existence, they brought up the rear of their division seven more times. They never even came close to winning more games than they lost. Three times, they posted the worst record in the entire league, once edging out a freshly-minted expansion club for the honor. Their dismal performance on the ice was reflected at the turnstiles. Bay Area residents figured

anything beat watching the Seals' version of the Ice Follies and stayed away in droves. After all, the one distinctive thing the team ever did was on the road. They spent their last two seasons in Cleveland, renaming themselves the Barons after Masterton's former minor league team. Not even this act of contrition could erase the dark fortune dogging the franchise. The last two cellar-dwelling years in Cleveland were equally disastrous both financially and artistically. Finally, the NHL put the Seals/Barons out of their misery. In a final bit of irony, the franchise wasn't simply dissolved. The tattered remnants of the never-proud team were absorbed by Masterton's other old employer, the Minnesota North Stars, making the Stars in some weird way the only team to have killed one of their own.



Good Riddance

Soccer: During the 1994 World Cup Finals, Colombian player Andres Escobar had the profound misfortune of committing the worst imaginable faux pas in the soccer player's lexicon. In an internationally televised first round match against the United States (that dreaded powerhouse of international soccer), Escobar inadvertently kicked the ball into the wrong goal. The US hung on to win by a score of 2-1. The stunning defeat helped send Columbia, one of the pre-tournament favorites, to an ignominiously early exit.

His countrymen took it hard. It was to be expected. Enthusiasm had been so great when Columbia beat Argentina to get into the finals, an estimated 100 people died in the celebrations. But no one realized how hard some people were taking it. A few weeks later, a group of men waylaid Escobar outside Bogota night club. Drawing guns, they shot the goat of the 1994 World Cup to death. Witnesses reported hearing one of the gunman saying "Thanks for the own-goal" before opening fire.

From Heaven

Baseball: As Bernard Doyle settled in his seat in the grandstand of the Polo Grounds on July 4th, 1950, he expected nothing but a pleasant, All-American day of baseball, fireworks, and beer. The 54-year old former boxing manager was treating a friend's son to an afternoon of baseball, and what an afternoon it would be: a double-header between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Just as the Dodgers stepped onto the field to start warming up, his afternoon ended. Doyle turned to say something to his young companion, only to slump forward in his seat, blood pouring from his head. He was taken to Harlem Hospital in a hastily summoned ambulance, but for naught. The autopsy revealed he'd died of a bullet wound to the head.

A few days later, a 14-year old boy, one of the local juvenile delinquents, broke down and admitted to police he had fired a shot into the stadium. From where he shot, he couldn't even see into the stands. But it did the trick.

ACED OUT!

The University of Evansville Purple Aces

Of the many cruel, unusual and oft well-deserved fates that can befall an athlete--crucified in the press, pelted by fans, cut by coaches, killed by opponents--by far the most spectacular is the Sports Mass Transportation Disaster (SMTD). The mere presence of a few jocks on a plane turns an ordinary ho-hum plane crash into an epic tragedy. Sport columnists, their pens honed by decades of reporting such gut-wrenching "tragedies" as lost games, broken arms, and blown calls, finally have the true cause to unleash torrents of purple prose on a morbidly curious public.

Editorial cartoonists churn out really cool panels of weepy fans and empty benches. Plans are drawn up for garish and expensive memorials. And the funeral/memorial services are invariably emotionally overwrought, potentially riotous affairs. Even in America, suffice by some overcome fan isn't unthinkable.

Rare is the sport untouched by these spectacular events. The world leader, of course, is soccer. Pilot error has decimated leading sides all over the world, most memorably England's Manchester United (eight players killed in 1958 crash) and Torino of Turin, Italy (completely wiped out on the eve of their fifth consecutive league title in 1949). Stateside, big time pro sports have so far been immune, although far from unprepared. All major leagues have disaster plans allowing partially-slaughtered squads to restock their rosters in mid season via emergency drafts, and totally decimated

teams to cancel the balance of their schedules. The pro carnage so far has been confined to minor league baseball and roller-derby bus crashes.

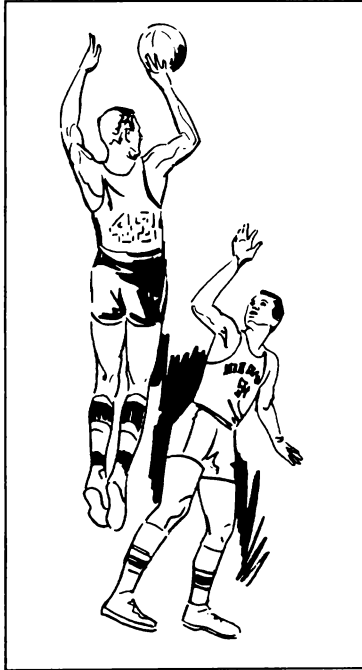
The highways, flyways, and byways have been far crueler to America's ostensibly amateur athletes. The entire membership of both the 1961 US Figure Skating team and the 1980 US Boxing team

were killed in overseas air crashes. Closer to home, several college football teams have freed up dozens of athletic scholarships in an instant, most notably in 1970 when Wichita State and Marshall State both lost major chunks of their traveling squads in plane crashes. The latter has been trumpeted as the worst American sporting disaster. But no SMTDs so thoroughly cleared the bench as the one which befell the University of Evansville Purple Aces in 1977.

The University of Evansville is a small, Methodist affiliated school with about 3000 students. The quiet, unassuming little school

in southern Indiana has a reputation for straightness; even as the storms of the '60s washed over campuses from Cal to Columbia, Evansville reportedly retained a disturbingly traditional all-American collegiate atmosphere, complete with a viable, popular fraternity and sorority system. And much of this campus spirit revolved around the pride of Evansville: the Purple Aces basketball team.

The Aces weren't just an obscure team of an obscure institution; they were a small-college powerhouse. They rampaged



through the little world of NCAA Division II much like perennial powers like UCLA and Kentucky did in Division I. For years, the purple juggernaut routinely crushed its fellow small colleges. And when the end of the year rolled around, more often than not, they were in the Division II tournament. This Valhalla of two-bit college basketball was held at Evansville's home court from its founding in 1957 through 1976. The trophy frequently didn't leave the building. The Purple Aces had (most ungraciously for a host!) won the title five times. They were the only team to win twice in a row--a feat they'd pulled off twice!

The year was 1977. The Division II tournament had been relocated to the basketball fountainhead of Springfield, Massachusetts. And so was Evansville; they'd made the jump to the big-time world of Division I, visions of a trip to the Big Tournament dancing before the athletic department's eyes. Sweet 16? Elite Eight? Perhaps (gasp!) even the Final Four? Ah, the glory that could be theirs.

But this inaugural campaign in the world of semi-professional basketball was not going well for the Aces. On the night of December 13, they were 1--3, hardly the start of a tournament year. The team mood was grim as they shivered in the rain and the fog at Dress Regional Airport, awaiting their charter to fly them down to Nashville for a game with Middle Tennessee State. Further compounding the gloomy atmosphere was the fact that their chartered DC-3 was late. It was a somber moment in a somber season that would be over far, far sooner than anyone expected.

When their plane finally arrived three hours late, the team and its entourage hastily piled on--according to one account, the plane didn't even spend 10 minutes on the ground. The pilot quickly taxied onto the runway, wheeled about, and began to take-off. All seemed well as the plane hurtled down the tarmac and gathered speed. But as it left the ground, the plane's nose pitched up at a steep angle. The pilot frantically struggled to regain control of the craft and gain altitude, but in vain. The plane smashed

into a wooded ridge two miles from the runway and burst into flames.

Rescuers arriving on the scene found a sea of mud. The impact had broken the plane into three sections, crowning the ridge with the largely-intact tail section and strewn "equipment, duffel bags, and college letter jackets" and, no doubt, deflated basketballs and pieces of players all over the hillside. Only two people survived the initial impact, and they wouldn't live to see the hospital. In all, 29 people died. Heading the list was the Purple Aces' entire 14-man roster, the first American team ever to be wiped out en toto. Also killed were the plane's three-man crew, two officials of the charter company, and the team's coach and trainer. The balance of the list was a nice cross section of the pond scum that always beefs up SMTDs: two student managers, the assistant athletic director, a sportscaster, two fans (no doubt major benefactors of the athletic department!) and the college comptroller(!). Presumably the team planned to get their full share of the gate.

Even as workers dug pieces of Purple Aces out of the mud and loaded them onto a rail flat car, rumors flew around the campus. Students descended upon the campus chapel. And as the rumors gradually coalesced into cold, hard facts, a palpable sense of grief washed over the campus. The basketball season was over.

A memorial service was held the next day as the campus community mourned its fallen heroes. One frat boy told reporters: "I felt disbelief and later sorrow that this could possibly have happened. Many of the older guys were very upset, but the younger ones didn't quite understand or know what to do." (?) The former chairman of the university athletic board was so overcome he couldn't even attend the services. "He's playing tennis," his wife told the reporters.

As is usual with tragedies of this sort, the public responded in various heartwarming and useless ways. Condolences poured in from across the country, many of which included substantial contributions for a fitting memorial and (more importantly) a vigorous team

THE FIRST CRASH

As dramatic as the squad-destroying plane crash may be, the history of SMTDs predates the advent of charter rates cheap enough to waste on athletes. Train, and more often, bus mishaps have been opening spots on the roster en masse for years. And it all apparently started in Indiana in 1903.

On Halloween morning, a special train entered Indianapolis, carrying the Purdue football team and a full complement of fans to the so-called "Indiana State Championship" game against their arch Hoosier rivals, the University of Indiana. Just inside city limits, the yard dispatcher blithely ordered a switch engine hauling a few coal cars onto the main track. Minutes later, the special rounded a curve. The horrified engineer of the football special knew he had no chance. After quickly reversing the engine, he jumped out of the locomotive, leaving the train to smash into the rear of the coal cars.

A tremendous crash cut short the cheerful singing of students and fans. The first coach of the train, filled with Boilermaker players, was almost demolished by the steel coal cars. The crash tore the roof off the flimsy wooden passenger coach and reduced its walls to kindling. The second car, carrying the band, partially telescoped, while a third coach tumbled down an embankment. The wreckage caught fire, but the flames were quickly extinguished.

The carnage was the heaviest on the first car. All 53 passengers, most of whom were players, were injured or killed. Three starters and seven substitutes were dead at the scene, along with an assistant coach and trainer. The second and third coaches added fans, students, and band musicians to the list of dead and wounded. The newspapers were filled with grim stories of severed limbs and smashed skulls. At least two victims were decapitated. Fortunately, the toll was almost completely confined to the first three cars. The president of Purdue and his family, in the fifth car, escaped completely uninjured.

In all, at least 16 people died, including 11 football players, with another 35 seriously injured. And thus was born a great tradition that continues to this day.

rebuilding program. Southern Illinois University even volunteered to take Evansville's place in the upcoming holiday tournament. Graciously, they offered to play just for expenses!

As is also usual, it didn't take long for sentiment and grief to turn to fury and anger. Within a week, parents of the victims had filed a pair of \$7 million suits. One charged the plane was "negligently maintained, serviced, and operated and overloaded at take-off..." The preliminary investigation revealed that, while it wasn't overloaded, they cut it pretty close. The plane had been only 148 pounds under its 29,900 pounds limit at takeoff. The NTSB concluded that the overloaded rear luggage compartment contributed to the crash. But the real cause was the control locks on the plane's rudder and right aileron--some idiot had forgotten to take them out!! Sniping continued well

into 1978. The University was even forced to publish an accounting of what they'd done with the \$330,000 donated to the school in the wake of the crash.

But the true endnote to the Purple Ace crash came less than two weeks later. Freshman basketball player David Furr had been sitting out the season with an ankle injury. He'd earned his keep by keeping statistics at home games, but didn't go on the road, no doubt to free up a seat for a well-heeled booster club member. Over Christmas break, while returning with his brother from watching his high school alma mater win a holiday basketball tournament, he lost control of his car on an icy patch of pavement and skidded into a truck. Both boys were killed. The Purple Aces rebuilding program truly had to start from scratch.



Killing Themselves for Sports

Some Sporty Suicide Notes

My life was over the minute that the Egypt/England match was over and the Egyptian national soccer team eliminated from the World Cup Finals. I wish the Egyptian team better luck in the 1994 World cup.

--Egyptian civil servant, 1990. Successfully hanged self.

I have been a Broncos fan since the Broncos were first organized and I can't stand their fumbling anymore.

*--Denver Broncos fan following a 5-fumble loss in 1973.
Attempt unsuccessful.*

Cannot run anymore.

*--Japanese marathoner Kokichi Tsuburaya; he had
suffered two injuries training to 1968 Olympics.
Successfully cut right carotid artery with a razor.*

The Note that We'll Never Read

Perhaps the most brilliantly staged sports-related suicide took place in 1971. Former star college pitcher Bruce Gardner, 32, was found dead on the University of Southern California baseball diamond, 15 feet from the pitching mound. He had had shot himself once in the head with a .38 caliber revolver still clutched in his left hand. In his right hand he held his USC diploma. Nearby was a plaque commemorating his being named an NCAA All-American and a suicide note. The contents of the note were apparently never made public.

Gardner had been a star pitcher in high school, completely focused on making the big leagues. He was offered a generous contract upon graduation, but let himself be talked into going to USC. He would always bitterly regret the move.

Not that his college career was unsuccessful. He posted an astonishing 40-5 record to win the aforementioned All-American plaque. Nor were his heroics confined to the diamond. In a fine bit of irony, he played the part of Joe Hardy, a man who sells his soul to the devil to become a big-league ball player, in a college stage production of *Damn Yankees!* He signed with the Dodgers after graduation; however, his bonus wasn't nearly what he'd been offered out of high school.

And then it all went to hell. Inducted into the Army, he injured his pitching arm during training. He never fully recovered. His five-year career in the minors was a slow slide towards oblivion. There were highs, but far more lows and further injuries. One of "Destiny's Darlings" (see "Read Hard or Die") knew him in the Dodgers farm system:

He wanted to make the big club in the worst way... He became a hypochondriac. He was always popping vitamin pills; he'd get a sniffle and he'd spend the day in his hotel room, under a vaporizer, you know, towel over his head and all that. Then he hurt his arm and it finished him.

After baseball, he worked for a time as a stock broker. But he couldn't stay away from the game. He became a high school teacher and a junior varsity baseball coach. This career choice apparently brought back one too many memories, putting on the path that led to his last stroll to the mound. It was fitting that the scene of his greatest triumphs would also be the stage for his final exit.



JOHNNY PLAYS YOUTH LEAGUE BASEBALL!!

And Quite Poorly, I'd Like to Point Out

In the obscure and remote suburb where I wasted the bulk of my youth, summer was a season of asphalt-melting heat and mind-numbing tedium. All suburbs are boring, but I like to think of my personal Levittown as being just a little bit above average in this regard. There were no bookstores. The movie theater was dying. Public transit was non-existent. In the true California tradition, the only realistic way of getting anywhere was via automobile. High points of the season were when someone gave me a ride to the library. I always hit the 10-book limit.

Thus, the spring I reached the minimum age of nine, I signed up for youth league baseball. To this day, I don't know what possessed me. I liked baseball cards, but only had a tenuous grasp of the rules and preciously little aptitude for hitting, running, catching, and throwing. Nonetheless, my parents paid the money. In return, I received a team t-shirt and baseball cap ("The Yankees") to go with my Blue Chip Stamp Denny McLain autograph mitt.

The wasn't T-ball. It was real baseball, complete with hard balls, overhand pitching, real umpires, standings, and playoffs. But it was *not* Little League. Everyone made a team, there were no fancy uniforms, and the games were played on well-worn public school diamonds. There was no way I was ever going to go out for Little League--my father had scared me with too many stories of kids wrecking their arms with curve balls and getting spanked behind the backstop for striking out.

However, not everyone in the youth association was interested in fun and games. Exhibit #1: our coach. He apparently fancied himself the second coming of Vince

Lombardi. Balding, ill-tempered, and aggressive, he ran the team with an iron fist. His favorite word was "hustle", one that he repeated at maximum volume as often as possible. We ran everywhere: to our positions, from our positions, and to nowhere in particular. The important thing was that we were "hustling." Since it wasn't Little League, he couldn't actually abuse us. We only had 11 players on the team. Two deserters would put him a twisted ankle away from a forfeit. Horrors! Punishment laps were reserved for the insubordinate, not the clumsy.

He'd won the championship the year before. From day one, it was plain he planned to repeat. Practices were frequent, well-run, and as intense as can be expected for a bunch of nine- and ten-year olds. For players supposedly assigned at random, there were a suspiciously large number of returnees from last year's squad. Our star player (nicknamed for some unknown reason "Boner") was the only prototypical jock on the team: big, slow, and capable of hitting the ball a startling distance. (He later distinguished himself in junior high by being the only member of the 8th grade boys basketball team at a basketball-mad school to not have a girlfriend.) We had some pretty decent pitchers, and some good players in the infield. Of course, not everyone was picked for ability. The coach's son (second base) was there more for reasons of nepotism. He was also most obnoxious person on the squad. His favorite (off-field) pastime was riding his bicycle straight at you, only to swerve away at the last second while shrieking "Eeerkkk" and giggling girlishly. (He got worse with age; as an adolescent, he took to calling people "Femiron Tablets" and incessantly spelling out "P-E-N-U-S, (sic) penis". Only the giggling remained unchanged.) He was also the only person on the team that I remember being actively mean; he mocked me when my parents bought me some baseball socks

* Conventional baseball fans like to remember Denny as the last pitcher to win more than 30 games in a season; I prefer to dwell on his more colorful post-baseball career, which has included a couple bankruptcies and two stints in prison for mail fraud, drugs, and racketeering



Yankees Team Photo
(your editor: front row, second from right)

because I hadn't "earned" them.

There were three of us (including me) who were never called, but could only be described as, "clumsy oafs." We were the first string benchwarmers and the second string outfielders; if it wasn't for a league rule requiring everyone to play, we would have gone in only in case of death or disabling injury. Of the three, I was probably the best fielder. Not that I was good--when I finally caught a fly in practice, no one was more surprised than I at the ball in my glove. But I was educable. While bounding balls slithered between the legs of my fellow oafs, I was dropping down on one knee in the approved fashion, playing the rebound off my chest, and heaving it in the general direction of a shrieking infielder. The coach, impressed by the punishment I was taking, tried me out at catcher. This brief experiment ended when he bounced the third warm-up pitch off my head.

I compensated for my fielding at the plate. I discovered two things during our pre-season games. First, I couldn't hit the ball; my most impressive blow was a foul ball that landed on top of my batting helmet. Second, those pitchers threw pretty darn hard.

In the endless practices and drills, we learned some good baseball: bunting, taking the 3-0 pitch, running with the pitch on two outs, and so on. Other "lessons" were less wholesome, like running over fielders careless enough to get in our way. If we weren't playing in tennis shoes, I'm sure we would have had regular spiking drills. Some things were downright embarrassing. To throw off the opponents, he had us chattering like mynah birds. We were always yelling and screaming at each other and our opponents. "Hey batter batter...." We would chant each time one of us went to bat, really stupid stuff like "Downs' up" for a kid

named Downs. I bet we had a good one for “Boner”, but damned if I can remember it. Perhaps it was a simple “Bone..er! Bone...er!” to intimidate the opposition.

But the worst was how we were taught to deal with inside pitches (translated: when the pitcher throws at you). Our coach told us, *not* to get out of the way. We were supposed to turn around and let the ball hit us. The stated theory was that there was nothing back there that could be hurt by a 10-year old pitcher. The theory was right; none of us ever got injured. But my backside bore mute witness to the fact that, while 10-year old pitchers can’t injure, they can throw hard enough for the stitch marks to be visible in the next day’s bruises. And we all knew the coach really had a hard-on for that free ticket to first base.

By the time the regular season started, I was in a state of shell shock. Several times a game (as few as possible as the coach could manage, I am sure), I would walk from the on-deck circle and take my place in the batter’s box, scuffling as I dug in. If I’d been wearing them, I would have contemptuously knocked the dirt from my spikes. I then took a few small practice swings and glared at the pitcher, daring him to put it across the plate. You would have never guessed I was in a state of the abject terror.

The pitchers would wind up and throw.

And I would freeze.

For the first month of the season, the bat never left my shoulder. I looked on as pitch after pitch flew by. Between shellshock, despair, and general neurosis, I simply couldn’t bring myself to swing. The only time I moved was to turn around and get hit in the ass yet again. People would ask me why I didn’t swing. In classic kid fashion, I answered, “I don’t know.” It was the truth. To be honest, I still don’t know exactly why I didn’t.

It drove everyone crazy. Especially my coach, which makes it, in retrospect, quite a good thing. This not being Little League, he couldn’t just throw me off the team or bench me permanently. And even he realized that his favorite motivational tactic (screaming) wasn’t going to do the trick. I can’t remember

everything that he did do, but I’m sure there was plenty of it. And none of it worked.

What probably kept him from totally blowing his cork was that this was not a bad strategy. Ten-year old pitchers are as likely to put it in your ear as over the plate. (One even managed to throw a pitch *behind* my back once.) Between the beanings and bases on balls, I spent plenty of time on base. Occasionally, an opposing coach would figure me out and scream at his pitcher to just put it over the plate, there was no way I was going to swing. And I’d still get the walk. I may have looked at plenty of called third strikes, but I never chased a bad pitch.

Later in the season, I mysteriously started swinging. Again, I haven’t the faintest idea what came over me. It just happened. I even managed to hit the ball fair a few times. I was so startled the first time, I slid (safely!) into first base. But I still hated the entire ritual. Sitting on the bench, hoping my turn at bat wouldn’t come that inning. My stomach slowly churning as the guys ahead of me at the bottom of the order went on deck. And then the nerve-wracking walk to the batter’s box to face some little jerk throwing a very hard ball. Personally, I would have preferred that they pinch hit for me every time.

Despite me and my fellow oafs, we had a great team. We rolled through the American Division like a steamroller, routinely racking up 10 or 20 runs in a 6-inning game and beating the hell out of almost everyone. We finished in first place with an 11-2-1 record, not without some controversy. I remember hearing about other coaches muttering about our tactics, and our coach got into some beef with the powers that be about using, or wanting to use, our best pitcher a little too often.

Only one team beat us. They were an otherwise undistinguished club sponsored by a hot dog stand. Unlike our usual riotous games, these were tense, low-scoring affairs we lost by scores like 4-3 and 5-4. I made a major contribution to one defeat by being caught in a triple play. Believe me, you have not seen chaos until you’ve seen 10-year olds turn a triple play. I knew the pitcher

had caught that little squib, but I ran because the cretin father coaching third base yelled at me to go. As soon as I got there, he screamed at me to go back. The ball zipped around the diamond like a comet while our baserunners ran back and forth in a state of utter confusion. When the poor high school kid behind the plate thumbed us out, the coach came roaring off the bench to do battle. You would have thought he had money on us. He lost the argument, heh heh. I understand even most big league players can retire after playing baseball for 20 or 30 years without ever getting caught in a triple play at any level. Not me.

The playoffs went true to form--we clobbered our first round opponents 12-3 and thumped another team 15-4 in the semifinals. For the championship, we were matched against the dreaded Power Machines, juggernauts of the National Division. It was only the name of their sponsor, but it fit them perfectly. They had a perfect 14-0 record, and our coach assured

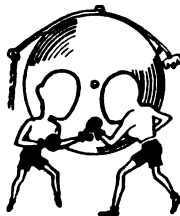
us it was no fluke (he'd been scouting!). The only encouraging note was that they'd had a little trouble with a team from our division in the semi-finals (20-14) that we'd beaten twice handily.

I remember preciously little about the championship game except my passionate desire to not screw up. My normal mildly anxious attitude in the outfield was replaced by pure tension; I spent the game actively wishing that the Power Machines wouldn't hit the ball, and if they did, hit it anywhere but at me out there in right field. I may have picked up a walk or two. The hero of the day was "Boner" whose two home runs accounted for our 10-8 victory. And I walked off the baseball field never to return. In future summers, my neighborhood would be deserted as all the neighbor kids went to their practices and games. But I was having none of it. Baseball was not one bit fun--I don't think I enjoyed a single minute of our championship season. I'd rather be bored than beated.

Afterword: Not too surprisingly, I didn't forge any strong and lasting bonds during my one abortive season. However, my last contact with a former teammate came under amusing circumstances. I ran into one of our catchers at a punk rock show in San Francisco in the early '80s. He'd always been a pugnacious player; my most distinct memory of him is the coach restraining him from a fight. He told me he'd just gotten out of San Quentin. He may have been bullshitting me. But, knowing him, it wasn't entirely unlikely.

A few minutes later, a slam dancer (as we called them then) smashed into him. By coincidence, I knew this other guy from college. He liked to think of himself as Mr. Tough Los Angeles Hardcore. Mr. Pretentious Valley Guy with a lopsided mohawk was closer to the mark. My erstwhile teammate took umbrage at this and shoved back. Mr. Hardcore took one look at him. He saw an average sized, muscular guy with long hair and no black leather jacket. In other words, an obvious pussy who'd be no match for a veteran of a Black Flag show. So he retaliated. But his spikes, leather jacket and cavalry boots failed him. Within seconds, Mr. Hardcore found himself on the ground getting stomped by a pair of distinctly un-punk rock tennis shoes.

It still makes me laugh to think about it.



Sports Dad Gone Mad

A Lethal Pre-Emption

One of the great clichés of American sporting life is the Little League Dad, unhealthily obsessed with their offspring's careers. Give 'em half an excuse and these lethal bores will happily give you an hour-long analysis (complete with full statistics) about Junior's latest exploits. Of course, they never tell you about the downside, like when they have to use the curtain rod on little Jimmy for booting that routine grounder.

North of the border, the Canadian equivalent is the Hockey Dad. And surely the ultimate Hockey Dad was Roy Spencer, who took his devotion to his son Brian's career to a new level on December 12, 1970.

It was an auspicious occasion. His son Brian, whom he'd seen through years of youth and minor league hockey, had made the big-time. The previous year, he'd made his NHL debut, not with just any team, but *the* team dearest to the hearts of English-Canadians: the Toronto Maple Leafs. He'd only lasted a handful of games before being sent down, but they'd just called him back up to fill in for an injured player. Not only was tonight's Leafs/Chicago game his first NHL game of the 1970/71 season, he was also scheduled to be interviewed between periods.

Proudly, father Roy tuned in the CBC's "Hockey Night In Canada". And lo and behold, what he saw was not the fine brand of hockey as played by Toronto and Chicago, but the lowliest type of expansion hockey: the Vancouver Canucks vs. the California Seals.

This was in the days before cable, 500 channel satellite TV, or even widely-available VCRs. Spencer was going to miss his son's shining hour! Plainly the situation

was critical. Resolute, decisive action was called for. Many people complain about what is on TV; well, Roy Spencer is one of the few to actually go out and do something about it.

In a rage, the aging (59 year-old), ailing (uremic poisoning) hockey father drove 60 miles through typically rotten Canadian winter weather to the local TV station. He told a TV reporter in the parking lot outside, "I don't like the CBC's hockey games. Why don't you broadcast more Toronto games?" He then burst into the station, prepared to emphasize his point with a gun. The very first thing he did was to order the director to take that damned Seals/Canucks game off the air. He told the terrified station staff, "I am very disturbed about CBC's coverage. There is going to be a revolution unless it changes." He then forced everyone into an empty studio. Unfortunately, reports are unclear over whether or not he was able to get them to switch to the Toronto/Chicago feed.

He also wasn't very thorough in his hostage-taking. One worker managed to slip away and call the police. When Spencer stepped out the front door, a fully armed contingent of constables was waiting. Spencer got in the first shot and injured one policeman, but they returned fire and shot him dead.

And Brian? He never really caught on with the Leafs. But he did do his father proud. He had a steady, if unspectacular, 10-year NHL career, spent mostly with the New York Islanders, the Buffalo Sabers, and the Pittsburgh Penguins. And undoubtedly, his career included many, many more appearances on "Hockey Night in Canada."



READ HARD OR DIE RETURNS!

GO BIG RED! by George Milla (U of Illinois Press, 1991)

There are plenty of memoirs by ex college players out there. Most fall into two categories: bragging by the stars, whining by the cut. This is a happy medium from a self described mediocre Nebraska player. Two things emerge from this book. Being a football player for most isn't about playing, it's about practicing--that's what most players do most of the time. It really is stupid. There's an unconscious subtext here--why would anyone (short of the star starters) put up with this sort of nonsense?

FEVER PITCH by Nick Hornby (Penguin, re-issued 1997)

Hornby's best know over here for **HIGH FIDELITY**, a novel everyone should (and all record store clerks *must*) read. In this earlier book, he writes of growing up a soccer fan. His team is Arsenal (a London team), and to this day, nothing short of a major disaster keeps Hornby from a home game. He's completely obsessed and irrational on the subject--and he knows it! He writes, not of the team, but of his obsession with them, spiced with that being-a-guy stuff he does so well. The stupid match report stuff is rightly relegated to a distant second. Up there with **AMONG THE THUGS** as a vital soccer book for people who really don't care who scored the winning goal.

A FALSE SPRING by Pat Jordan

Jordan writes about his brief stint in baseball's low minor leagues, from hot bonus baby to washed up bum. It's far from a conventional baseball book, or even an unconventional baseball book. Perhaps the best way to describe it is lowlife literature that just happens to have a baseball setting. Highly literate, yet fascinatingly tawdry. For incessant re-reading.

DESTINY'S DARLINGS by Martin Ralbovsky (Hawthorn, 1974)

In 1954, a team from Schenectady, NY, won the Little League World Series. They were highly feted; banquets, parades, a trip to the real World Series and even an appearance on the "Today Show" ensued. Twenty years later, Ralbovsky looks them up. And what does he find? A former star pitcher who can't even throw a ball across the street. An obese high school teacher still living with his parents ("...my life has been pretty much of a big zero.") A pair of players who made it to the majors--but only briefly. And an over-riding sense of having been used by their coach. Still want your kid to go out for Little League?

BETWEEN THE LINES by Steve Howe (Masters Press, 1989)

Pretty much your standard stardom/cocaine/comeback recovery sage by pitcher Howe. Fun, but not as much fun as I had buying the book.

Several years back, my friends the Doanes took me to see a Class A (the lowest there is) minor league baseball game. It was great fun--good, cheap seats, amusing on-field action, and that wonderfully seedy old-time atmosphere that comes at a good, run-down minor league park. Thanks to some Japanese ownership, there was even saki at the concession stand. Beats Bud any day.

Howe was on the team (but not pitching that night), starting on yet another comeback from coking out. After the game, we hit the souvenir stand where they were selling this book. We bought, of course. But the best part was seeing Howe's wife come out a few minutes later, carefully checking how many copies had been sold. How the mighty fall.



SPORTS THRILLS



A collection of the finest tales of the darkest side of sports around the world. Who cares about the winning goal in the waning seconds? The riot after the game is just so much more interesting...

The Soccer Killing Fields..... 4

They've got it all in Glasgow, Scotland. Riots. Stampedes. Dead players. Hooligan fans. In short, a plentiful supply of everything that makes soccer great

Gangway!..... 15

A baseball game. A mob of over-amped children, and an under-supply of stadium staff. Toss in an escalator running berserk, and you have....

The Great Big Game Disaster..... 16

It was great, and most certainly big--the worst disaster to ever befall spectators at an American sporting event. And it happened at the "Big Game." But, above all, it was unspeakably bizarre. You won't believe it until you read it.

Quotable Quotes 27

Gems of wisdom from the wonderful world of sports.

The Class of '31 28

1931, the year when the players were dropping like flies on gridirons across America. Snap! Crack! Pow!

On Ice 34

The first, and so far, the only NHL player to die in the line of duty. (I didn't believe it either)

Aced Out! 38

Athletes used to die one at a time. Until planes. Now, you can lose an entire team (just like the University of Evansville) in an instant.

Killing Themselves for Sport 41

Some people take sports seriously, perhaps a little too much so.

Johnny Plays Youth League Baseball! 42

My foray into the perzine genre. Memoirs of the sordid chapter in my life when I gave up my personal freedom for the regimented lifestyle of youth association baseball. It wasn't pretty.

Sports Dad Gone Mad..... 46

He'd guided his son from PeeWee hockey to the NHL. Then the bastards thought they could get in his way. A tragedy of the pre-cable age.

Read Hard or Die 47

Yes, it's back, and it's all about sports! But not one bit of Frank Merriwell

